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CONFLICT IN THE LOCAL CHURCH:  
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ITS CAUSES AND CREATIVE RESOLUTION

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the School of Theology  
at Claremont, California

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Religion

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by  
Charles P. Hamby

June 1965

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*This dissertation, written by*

Charles P. Hamby

*under the direction of his Faculty Committee,  
and approved by its members, has been presented  
to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of  
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requirements for the degree of*

**DOCTOR OF RELIGION**

*Faculty Committee*

Harvey Auer

Francis H. Stender

John L. Minton

*Date*

April 9, 1965

F. Thomas Trotter

## INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of the social gospel more than a half century ago innumerable local church bodies and several denominational organizations have become embroiled in controversy and conflict over social issues. There has been confusion in the minds of many lay people, and some ministers, regarding the church's responsibility and role in social change. The perplexity has been compounded by the rise and spread of communism with its hopes for social revolution in every culture. Some people have been unable to distinguish between a Christian's hope and work for social justice, in racial matters for example, and a Communist's objectives and methods. This plus other contributing factors have caused severe conflicts. The results have been far reaching.

There is a difference between social controversy and social conflict. Edward O. Moe distinguishes between "controversy as discussion and interaction involving serious disagreement on major issues" and conflict which is a more intense disagreement "where a high degree of polarization into hostile camps takes place, where other community relationships are damaged or destroyed, and where disagreement over the issue is converted into hostility and possible violence toward the antagonist".<sup>1</sup> Conflict involves a struggle for power and control over a group or an organization. Controversial issues may lead to conflict when Christian attitudes are absent and democratic procedures are sub-

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<sup>1</sup>Edward O. Moe, Controversy and Conflict (Cincinnati: Board of Missions, The Methodist Church, 1964), p. 3.

verted. In such an atmosphere a contest between two factions over the decisions and policies of a group can resolve itself into a hostile struggle.

Conflict in the church arises in many ways. It may come about as a result of incorrect expectations concerning the role of the church in social change because there has been a lack of proper communication between the leaders and the people with regard to the mission of the church. It may result from pressure being applied on the leaders by those in the church who have certain economic and political philosophies which are not in harmony with the prevailing values and goals of the church. It may originate from propaganda and agitation from outside the church. It may be fostered and intensified because certain individuals have deep ego needs which make them conflict prone and because some closely knit groups in the church occasionally develop something of a pathological urge to oppose the program of the church.

Even though considerable research in the social sciences on the nature, causes, and resolution of social conflict is being carried out, very little study and attention has been given to the problem of conflict in local church bodies. Save for a few articles, pamphlets and chapters in books on other subjects, little has been published on the subject. The present study is a systematic attempt to cover this field and to offer suggestions to local churches concerning the nature of conflict, its causes, development, and dynamics, and methods of keeping it on a constructive plane.

Therefore, the purpose of this study has been two fold: First, to probe deeply into the nature and causes of conflict in the church



and to analyze these with the aid of the social sciences. Research procedure has included: (a) the analysis of data from recent studies in the fields of Social Psychology and Sociology on the nature and causes of conflict, the analysis of ideological factors which play a part in conflict, and, (b) the application of this body of knowledge to the local church, including those situations in which extremist activities have disrupted the fellowship.

The second and major purpose of the study has been to search for methods and procedures by which conflict can be resolved creatively and its detrimental effects on the church and individuals avoided. Research under this portion of the study has been (a) in the resources of the Christian faith, and (b) in the experimental studies in the behavioral sciences especially on the strengths of democratic procedures as opposed to authoritarian methods. Finally, considerable thought has been given to the implications for the local church program which these findings seem to indicate.

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## CHAPTER I

### CONFLICT IN LOCAL CHURCHES

"Church Vestry Blocks Move to Oust Curate" was the headline of a recent news story in a local paper. The article which followed told of a raging conflict in a church. A play, the theme of which advocated fair housing practices as a solution to many racial problems, had been presented in the sanctuary. Some members took exception to the play and to a talk which followed it given by one of the rectors on the implications of a statewide proposition to nullify fair housing legislation. At the vestry meeting a parish member who had the position of legal counsel to the vestry opened the controversy with a demand for a statement by the vestry and the rectors that they would not again advocate the defeat or passage of any legislation while on church property.

When the disputant lost this appeal amid debate over what constitutes a moral, ethical, or political issue, he produced a petition signed by eighty-two of the four hundred adult members of the parish. It threatened the withholding of ninety percent of pledged monies on the part of the signatories until the rectors acquiesced to their demand for silence on political issues. Other startled members rose to charge that the petition was an attempt at blackmail. Finally, the disgruntled members called for the resignation of the curate who was assistant rector. The nine-man vestry resolutely refused to ask for it and took its stand with the rectors.

Church conflicts which are strikingly similar and yet with important variations have been occurring in most Protestant denominations

in innumerable places across the country in recent years. They bear testimony to the nature of man, institutionalized evils, the power of the gospel, and the tumultuous age in which we live. President Clark Kerr of the University of California, in explaining incidents of student protest demonstrations on the Berkeley campus, said students everywhere "reflect the mood of the nation itself (which) to a degree is a disturbed place" concerned with the peril of nuclear war, civil rights, and other issues.<sup>1</sup> The same could be said of church conflicts. Indeed, as historians survey the forces which meet on the battleground of present day human relations, they may wonder that our conflicts were not more violent and severe.

#### I. THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

Conflict is one of the inevitable consequences of social intercourse. Each person has his own drives, motives, and prejudices. These rarely mesh into harmony within any group or between groups. If they did, life would be rather static. The nature of life, however, is a process in which opposing forces play upon one another in reciprocity. Some philosophers call these forces polemics. Every thesis has an antithesis, said Hegel, and out of their conflict comes a synthesis. This forms a new thesis which again has its antithesis.

Conflict is a part of the nature of social life. Kenneth E. Boulding has said that the social organizations of men are comprised of three fundamentals:

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<sup>1</sup>Los Angeles Times, October 7, 1964, Part II, p. 1, Col. 5.

Social systems are compounded of at least three elements - necessity, chance, and freedom. Such purely mechanical models as that of the solar system, which have nothing in them but necessity, are never adequate to describe social systems. Social processes are always in some sense stochastic; they have chance elements built into them, and hence their course cannot be predicted in detail, although it may be possible to calculate the probability of future events. However, social systems have still a third element - freedom. This is because social systems are composed of people, and people are capable of knowledge....<sup>2</sup>

Since men have knowledge of a sort, they will try to shape events accordingly. The presence of necessity, chance, and freedom in social situations, therefore, is enough to insure that wherever men come together in groups, there will be conflicts which they must adjudicate in some manner, for their finite judgments about what the future ought to be like are bound to differ in most circumstances.

Men have employed numerous methods during the course of history to resolve their differences. The most primitive method has been physical combat, ranging from the use of clubs and knives to guns and explosives. Unrestrained battles and wars in which men fight to destroy the other party is the crudest of all methods. If Christians are not beyond the use of this method in international relations, surely they are in the church. Another method of conflict resolution in history has been the use of rules, laws, ordinances, commandments, and the like, by which men agree to abide. When there is a conflict among law abiding men, they resolve it in a court of law, one party receiving rewards and the other damages. Creative problem solving is

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<sup>2</sup>Kenneth E. Boulding, "Conflict Applied to Organizations" in Robert L. Kahn and Elsie Boulding (eds.) Power and Conflict in Organizations (New York: Basic Books, 1964), pp. 136-137.

the most mature and recent method, historically speaking, of resolving conflict. In this method, men respect each other's rights, desires, and ambitions, and through compromise attempt to reach agreement wherein the essential values of all parties are preserved.

Men's lives, therefore, are filled with the drama of offense and defense which arises from the encounter of diversified values, different motives, and varied purposes. Like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, we have "fightings within and without". An article in Social Action states that conflict is:

...a part of life, not to be evaded or regretted but faced and dealt with in Christian love. It is of the essence of the normality of life lived in groups and communities, though sometimes we regard it as a strange, abnormal phenomenon. Conflict stems from the universality of difference and from our finiteness and partial understandings. It is not, therefore, a question of whether or not we have conflict but of how we deal with it in interpersonal relationships....<sup>3</sup>

The differences which occur in human relations can be scaled according to degree. Some of the opposite ideas and outlooks are hardly discernable in conversation. Differences at this level could be thought of as mere dialogue. A little stronger discord could be characterized as an encounter or confrontation. Next in order would be controversy which begins at the point of heated debate. Social conflict lies between controversy and physical combat. It represents a clash between seemingly incompatable forces in social relations.

The Christian faith calls its adherents into conflict with injustice and evil in the world. Where persons deny the humanity of

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<sup>3</sup>Dan W. Dodson, "The Creative Role of Controversy", Social Action, XXIX, 2 (February 1963), 64.

others and take away their right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness", true Christians are constrained to enter the struggle on behalf of the downtrodden. They do not seek conflict as such but have it thrust upon them as they challenge the vested interests of the unjust. The Lambeth Conference in 1958 declared:

"The Church sometimes has to take the responsibility for creating conflict, never, legitimately, on its own behalf but to remedy injustice and to halt oppression...."<sup>4</sup>

Little social change can be brought about without conflict, for most social evils involve disputed values which both sides elevate to a level of ultimacy. The reformer says these conditions must and can be changed. His opponents say they must not and cannot be changed. The belief that significant change can take place gradually and slowly does not take into account the inherent resistance to change in human nature. Persons who imagine their destiny to be tied to the maintenance of the status quo are loath to change, especially when economic interests, prestige, or power are involved. A moral shock in which they are compelled to confront the stark tragedy which their unjust attitudes have produced in the lives of others is often required to bring a realignment in their system of values.

The conflict in which Christians are engaged with the injustices in society can be a redemptive process in which men on both sides of the struggle grow in stature. This has been one of the great benefits of the non-violent social revolution being lead by Christian persons of the Negro race. Their approach in almost all cases has

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<sup>4</sup>The Lambeth Conference, 1958 (London:S.P.C.K.; Boston:Seabury Press, 1958), p. (2), 121.



been based on such high ethical principles and their attitudes have been so disciplined in the redeeming graces that only the hardened bigots have been unaffected. We rather suspect that they too will never be quite the same again. Most of the non-violent leaders of the Negro revolt have been a credit to the Christian faith. They have been engaged in conflict in its highest and most creative sense.

## II. CONFLICT WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

When Christians come to church, they do not always leave their psychological and social conflicts behind. They come as men who have been strongly influenced by the culture in which they live. Nearly all the influences of society are found in the church, at least to a small degree. The same individual differences in personality and opinion which men have elsewhere, they also bring to the church. This is understandable since cultural conditioning continues even for those who are still growing in the Christian life, and since the complexity of modern issues leads to disagreement even among sincere, dedicated Christians. Such disagreements may have value, since differences are necessary in a free society and a democratic church. Men cannot have freedom without differences, and they cannot have differences without conflict. This would seem to be especially true in the area of social issues.

Consequently, we would expect to find conflict in the church. Its presence there, as such, does not constitute a spiritual failure; rather, it can be a sign of health. A church without conflict is usually one that has not been dealing with vital issues and is largely

irrelevant to modern life, or one that has been stifled by a pressure for conformity. In the latter case homogeneity is put forth as the only value in human relations. Members are led to conform to the opinions of the authorities for fear of being isolated and expelled from the fellowship. This is regrettable from our standpoint, since the growing edge of the Christian life is not found in conformity to authoritarianism but in expressed doubt, tension, and difference.

As Daniel Katz has pointed out, we do not assume:

...that all conflict is bad and that the only objective toward which we should work is the resolution of conflict. Group conflict has positive social functions, just as individual conflict contributes to individual development. What is inherently evil in conflict is its resolution through violence and destruction, for violence corrupts its users. Without conflict, however, there would be few problems, little stimulation, and little incentive for constructive efforts. Organizations without internal conflict are on their way to dissolution."<sup>5</sup>

Destructive conflict. Conflict in the church is contrary to God's purposes only when it is allowed to degenerate into a struggle which is devoid of redeeming love. Conflict becomes destructive when its dynamic course is unrestrained and persons are caught in a reciprocal deterioration of respect for one another. Before they realize what is occurring, they are reflecting hostile attitudes, repeating gossip, leveling charges, and denouncing people, which in their better moments they would know is unbecoming to persons in a Christian fellowship.

When conflict of this nature spread through a church in Phoenix,

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<sup>5</sup>Daniel Katz, "Approaches to Managing Conflict", in Kahn, op. cit., p. 114.

the Session composed a statement which was read by its chairmen in the worship services on Sunday, December 17, 1961. It said in part:

The Session....has determined that continuing widespread dissemination among members of this congregation of unverified allegation threatens to deter its central mission of witness to God and threatens to disrupt the peace and unity of the congregation...Particularly disruptive have been those criticisms and charges directed against the ministers...and those condemnations of the National Council.<sup>6</sup>

Constructive conflict. Conflict can be the occasion for advancement toward Christian maturity when persons grow in their ability to respect and accept one another's opinions and when they can find reconciliation beyond their differences. As long ago as 1924 Mary Parker Follett wrote: "It is possible to conceive conflict as not necessarily a wasteful outbreak of incompatibilities but a normal process by which socially valuable differences register themselves for the enrichment of all concerned."<sup>7</sup> The values which can be realized through conflict come through reaching new levels of understanding and acceptance of one another. Dan Dodson has written:

If God alone is Lord of the conscience, and if being in Christ can permit Christians, while retaining their self-interest, to rise above it, then healthy, expressed conflict can actually enhance the peace, unity, and purity of the church. It can make reconciliation an experience, as well as a doctrine, in the life of the Church.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Julian J. Keiser, "Illustration One", Social Action, XXIX, 2 (February 1963), 12.

<sup>7</sup>Mary Parker Follett, Creative Experiences (New York: Longmans, Green, 1924), pp. 300-301.

<sup>8</sup>Margaret E. Kuhn, "Dealing with Controversy", Social Progress, LI, 6 (April 1961), 12-18.

This same idea was illustrated by K. E. Boulding in a striking metaphor: "Discord may be necessary to make music interesting and to give it drama, but its significance lies in the ability of the composer to resolve discord into some meaningful harmony".<sup>9</sup> Amid every conflict in the church, we would hope that reconciliation could find fulfillment through patient understanding of human limitations and loving acceptance of that which God has dignified in all men.

### III. ORIGINS OF CHURCH CONFLICT

Most church conflict over social issues arises spontaneously, without external agitation. It is less deeply rooted when it arises simply out of lack of communication and information. It is more serious when the persons involved have deep running prejudices and are strongly opinionated. Conflict is initiated when something happens which upsets the social equilibrium with feelings of fear and insecurity resulting. Perhaps a sermon is preached which brings some social injustice into sharp focus and stereotyped attitudes are challenged. Or maybe the minister becomes active in a fair housing committee and a few persons from minority groups begin to move into the community. On the other hand, perhaps a Negro family visits the worship services and persons in the congregation fear they may join the church. At any rate, a new element is thrown into the social equation, or an old element is suddenly seen in a new light. There is a disruption of usual attitudes and relationships.

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<sup>9</sup>Kenneth E. Boulding, Conflict and Defense (New York: Harper & Row 1963), p. 306.

Fear of Communism. In the contemporary church an important source of conflict is the background of fear and suspicion of Communist influences in the church created by extremist propaganda against the National Council of Churches and denominational leaders. In such an atmosphere social action takes on the air of a plot or conspiracy in which the church leaders have been duped. Ideological differences are liable to be seen as treason. Psychological predispositions toward neurotic behavior are intensified in such a climate of fear. Groups tend to become rigid and authoritarian in their methods.

For as long as a year prior to the severe conflicts in some of the churches in Phoenix, The Arizona Republic gave extensive coverage to the activities and pronouncements of the "frightpeddlers" who came to town with their broadside charges against the mainstream of Protestantism. The Rev. Billy James Hargis, a professional anti-communist who heads the Christian Crusade, and Rev. Carl McIntere, head of the fundamentalist American Council of Churches, held frequent anti-communist rallies in Phoenix with the paper giving full play to their diatribes against "Communism in the Churches". Whether by newspapers, mimeographed letters, or word of mouth, similar distortions of anti-communists have been widely disseminated in other communities.

Extremist agitation. A still more difficult kind of conflict is that which results from direct outside extremist contact with people in the church. Such a conflict includes all the circumstances of an spontaneous internal conflict, plus the agitation of a trained, outside opposition. Among the sources of difficulty are several laymen's organizations which direct their propaganda, not at the general public,

but at the active members of churches. Walter Muelder calls these groups the "Protestant Underworld." They make every effort to carry their influence into all local churches. The National Committee of Christian Laymen, which also played a major role in the church conflicts in Phoenix, sends out the following appeal to as many churchmen as they can:

Would you be interested in a fellowship of Christian laymen dedicated to...enlisting individual churches in investigating the charges against the National Council of Churches...and these charges having been found to be valid, urging these churches to withdraw support from and sever ties with said Council...?<sup>10</sup>

The nature of these ultraconservative laymen's groups will be discussed in a later chapter. However, two other illustrations will be cited here to make clear their involvement in some of the conflict in local churches. The Methodist Laymen of North Hollywood, Incorporated, in a letter sent to thousands of lay persons said in part:

We believe it is our imperative duty to inform others about issues, pronouncements and practices which, if unchallenged will destroy our church...We urge you to study the enclosed booklet ("Sowers of Discord" by Charles S. Poling) and other material as provided. We also urge you to relate yourself to, and support our growing laymen's organization.<sup>11</sup>

Recently, a district superintendent gave a report in a local church on the General Conference of his church to which he was a delegate. As a leading layman was leaving he remarked to his pastor that, since he had now heard with his own ears evidence that the church was

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<sup>10</sup>Letter from National Committee of Christian Laymen, Phoenix, Arizona. May, 1964.

<sup>11</sup>"Don't Leave Your Church", Methodist Laymen of North Hollywood, Calif., June 2, 1962.

going Communist, this would be his last Sunday. Upon investigation it was found that he had been reading the materials of the Methodist Laymen of North Hollywood, Inc. Such stories could be duplicated by many pastors and laymen.

#### IV. THE EFFECTS OF CHURCH CONFLICT

The more severe and hostile conflict is, the more difficult it is to resolve creatively. This would seem to be axiomatic. Likewise, the more free-wheeling and unredeemed conflict is, the more detrimental it is to the church and its program. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain all the negative effects of an unmitigated church "fight", but we will survey some of the more obvious.

Democratic procedures in group work and freedom of the pulpit are among the first to suffer from severe conflict. Normal respect for people and their opinions disappears in a hostile atmosphere. Coercion and authoritarianism tend to become the mode of operation. Boards and committees suddenly become rigid in their procedures. The pastor does not have the freedom in the pulpit which he should have in applying the Christian faith to life. In a certain church which had been in conflict for some time, a layman approached the pastor between services and told him that if he used a specific illustration in the second sermon which he had used in the first, that he and several others would attend and leave at that juncture as a matter of protest. The pastor yielded in the face of such a threat.

Unmitigated conflict also has detrimental effects on the social action program of the church. It is often necessary to curtail

special programs and studies until conflict is resolved. Good attendance and participation is hard to achieve unless there is a positive attitude toward them in the church. Most people stay away from gatherings which they feel will be the center of difficulty. Many would rather watch westerns on television where the issues are simple and conflict is settled in absolute terms. Unless a creative solution to conflict is found, the entire area of social concerns is most often put aside as too controversial. After conflict over a fair-housing resolution in an official board at one church, there were many prayer meetings in the months that followed to restore harmony but the church's social action program diminished to inactivity.

Attendance at worship services is adversely effected by unresolved conflict. One of the main reasons is that conflict demoralizes people, especially those in the middle ground who are not directly involved. Their confidence in the leadership of the church is shaken, and even though this can be restored in time, they do not have the glad feeling that all is well. Morale goes down in sustained conflict. Another reason for lower attendance is that people involved in conflict often use absence from worship as a form of protest. They register their disapproval by staying away.

Destructive conflict adversely affects the public relations of a church. If conflict is prolonged, the image of the church in the public mind becomes stereotyped. "Churches sometimes have difficulties, but it seems that church is always fighting" is the usual epigram. When church conflict is carried in news stories a wide spread negative image is given to the church and bad public relations



reach a zenith. Some newspapers, thankfully, do not carry such stories, but where they do the public image of the church is damaged; the publicity also intensifies the conflict and causes more people to become involved in it.

The stewardship of members generally decreases in unmitigated conflict, and the finances of the church suffer, at least to a small degree, and in some instances rather severely. This can be a spontaneous reaction to a conflict as a result of being demoralized, or it can be a part of a vehement protest. The withholding of pledges and offerings has been seized upon as a pressure tactic by the rebellious laymen's organizations. In certain sections of the country they have effectively cut off the sending of world service funds from many local churches to denominational treasuries, because a small portion of it goes to support the work of the National and World Councils of Churches. Sometimes the reason is the support of the civil rights movement by the denominational agencies or leaders.

The Laymen's "Social Action" Study Group, composed of men from several churches in Southern California, is in protest against the social action program of the United Church of Christ. The group asks laymen to write letters of protest to denominational leaders and to sponsor resolutions of censure in local official boards. If these measures fail, they make the following proposal: "...the laity can forthwith cancel our memberships and/or cut or eliminate our pledges."<sup>12</sup> How successful this particular group has been in

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<sup>12</sup>Laymen's "Social Action" Study Group, Sierra Madre, Calif.  
Information Letter # 17 (September 1964)

reaching its objectives is not known. However, the Christian Century, in an editorial, reports that many churches are experiencing reduced income as a result of conflict over racial issues. One church in suburban Chicago suffered a 25 per cent reduction of its income because the pastor and lay leaders decided to prepare the church for the coming of minority groups. In commenting on this, the editorial said: "Since all giving to churches is voluntary, refusal to give is not a new thing. But refusal based on church policies relating to racial justice has grown in recent years and probably results in the withholding of an appreciable sum."<sup>13</sup>

A final effect of destructive conflict is the loss of members. It does not always eventuate with persons withdrawing and severing ties, but it often does. One Methodist Church in Phoenix lost over one hundred members during a conflict over social issues. Occasionally people withdraw when they learn the church's position on social issues. These people may have been poorly trained in membership classes. At any rate, they have not found a mature Christian faith nor known how the church's official position is derived. Consequently, they are susceptible to the propaganda of the "Apostles of Discord" who urge them to leave the mainline Protestant churches.

In other conflict situations, relations between people deteriorate to the degree that some of them feel there is nothing left to do but leave the church. As a result, they withdraw and the estrangement

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<sup>13</sup>"Backlash Hits The Churches" Christian Century, LXXXI, 33 (August 12, 1964), 1004-1005

which is a part of conflict is sealed. The depth of the Christian faith with its powers of reconciliation is left untapped. This is a tragedy, for conflict can be the beginning of reconciliation, if those involved take their faith seriously and learn to accept other people in a Christian spirit.

#### V. THE CHURCHES' DILEMMA

Unmitigated conflict places a church in a dilemma: shall it struggle and strive, paying the full measure of damages in the terms just reviewed, or shall it seek harmony to the point of ignoring moral principles, ethical ideals, and the like. The case for seeking homogeneity and full harmony in the fellowship of the church is a strong one. Are we not to love one another? Does not the hostility of conflict refute that love? Does not conflict tend to maximize the exclusive attitude which we identify with selfishness? Does it not cause men to break communications and to polarize into hostile sides?

After the political campaign in the fall of 1964 in which disputed issues were hotly debated both in the church and outside it, a successful and mature pastor of a suburban church wrote in his church newsletter:

There are folks in this town for whom I feel a deep pity. When I meet them on the street, they look the other way, they do not smile, they do not speak. I refuse to hate any person, hate is poison, and while I choose to disagree, I also choose to have goodwill in my heart for all God's children. I will not let myself get down in the gutter to hate another, but I will not surrender my convictions to keep another from being bitter toward me. If we cannot disagree and have fellowship, then our ideal of a democratic society is based on a shallow foundation and our commitment to Christ is little more than a thin veneer covering our prejudices and pagan loyalties.

Some find it easy to justify avoidance of such a dilemma, since such bellicose behavior is both harmful to individuals and to the church. Rejection, suppression, and maltreatment inflict wounds on the human personality. Scars from hostile encounters, which bring out the worst in human nature, sometimes have lasting effects. Is work for social justice worth the conflict and disruptions of human relations which it sometimes brings? Would it not be better to have the institution function smoothly and personal relations remain on a jovial plane?

Those who answer these questions in the affirmative and say that Christians should seek harmony at any price seemingly do not understand that we can love and respect one another and still have honest differences. Christians can challenge the injustices which they find in society without feeling enmity toward those who have prejudices, or are otherwise involved in social evils. If our concern is redemptive, we will not intentionally alienate others whose attitudes and behavior we are trying to change. The Christian has every inclination to hold them in fellowship while he is working to remove the evils connected with their lives.

Yet, at times it seems we have no alternative but to pay a price for change, for those whose attitudes we would influence often alienate themselves from us by giving an immature response to conflict. They seemingly are unable to see such an encounter on anything but a plane of personal hostility. But we should bear in mind that acquiescence to such immature attitudes or to the pressures of vested interests which require the surrender of Christian moral and ethical

principles would leave a church unworthy of continued existence.

Harry Giles has said:

Sometimes an...organization, anxious to get members, will try to avoid controversies at all costs. It blurs over differences among its present members and tries to make itself all things to all people. Such a policy frequently prevents the organization from taking any firm and decisive stands or actions. Its program gets cluttered with trivia. Special interest-arousing methods need to be resorted to, since flesh and blood are missing from its policy.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, at times we should follow the ethical teachings of our faith, even though it would appear that it would doubtless mean conflict. In such an instance, we should apply all the principles of creative conflict resolution which we know in order to restore good human relations and maintain fellowship in the church. Methods of creative resolution of conflict are built on mutual respect for the person of others, the finding and facing of facts, and the meeting of minds in search for reasonable solutions to disputes.

Thankfully, a forthright program of Christian social concerns can be carried on in most churches without destructive conflict. This is especially true where churchmen remember that "Christian community has depth and meaning not because there aren't differences and conflicts but because in Christ men of many differences of culture, race, economics, social, and educational backgrounds are one and know the reconciling power of God in his church."<sup>15</sup> If we put our faith to work, we can find creative ways to bring order out of chaotic

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<sup>14</sup>H. Harry Giles, "The Tool Kit: Handling Controversy," Adult Leadership, II, 6 (November 1953), 17-23.

<sup>15</sup>Dodson, op. cit., p. 64.

situations and to bring about a new understanding of the reasons for the church's existence. The Apostle Paul did that for the church in conflict at Corinth. The members were having difficulties over their various loyalties to different apostles. Factions were formed and strife took place, but Paul directed their commitment to a more ultimate value: "No other foundation can any man lay than that which is laid" in Christ.

## CHAPTER II

### PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS RELATED TO CHURCH CONFLICT

General Thomas Vincent once said that all conflicts and problems of international relations could be traced in their origins to the inability of people individually to relate to one another. Even though this may be an oversimplification of some very complex problems, it nevertheless contains an element of truth and points to the axiom that social conflict arises ultimately between groups composed of individuals. We may analyze conflict on several levels, as we shall attempt to do in this study, but it is primarily and intensely personal. The human factors which sometimes produce friction in husband-wife, father-son, employee-employer, teacher-student, or any other human relationship are also operative among individuals in church conflict.

All persons to some degree are psychologically susceptible to conflict, but it would appear that some are far more inclined toward it than others. Research in the social sciences has isolated a personality type: the authoritarian personality, and a personality disorder: the expansive-aggressive neurotic, both of which are conflict prone. We shall consider each of these and their possible involvement in church conflict.

#### I. THE EXPANSIVE-AGGRESSIVE NEUROTIC PERSONALITY

Psychoneurotics are emotionally disturbed people. They have strong compulsions and irrational attitudes. They unrealistically

believe that certain things must occur and certain others must not. Albert Ellis lists almost twenty characteristics of the neurotic personality. They are often indecisive, hesitant, and doubtful. They are virtually always irrationally afraid of something. They usually feel they are inadequate in general or specific ways. They are most often severe moralists who blame others and themselves. They are inclined to be supersensitive and over-suspicious. Many are hostile and aggressive. They are generally unable to face reality when it is painful to their ego, and they use many defense mechanisms to avoid it. They exhibit rigidity and compulsiveness. Many take a rebellious, antisocial path in life. They are often tense and unable to relax. Overexcitability is another characteristic frequently seen. They can be overambitious or have a tendency to avoid responsibility by escape. The average neurotic is either steadily or sporadically unhappy and depressed. He is almost invariably self-centered with an inordinate desire to be loved but very little capacity to give love. "They are so incessantly concerned with themselves and their own problems that they have neither the time, the energy, nor the inclination truly to care for another human being."<sup>1</sup>

Some psychiatrists estimate that one out of ten persons is seriously neurotic. Needless to say, a fair share of them is to be found in churches. St. Clair recently published a book which deals exclusively with the subject of emotionally disturbed persons in the

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Ellis, How To Live With A Neurotic (New York: Crown, 1957), p. 55.



church.<sup>2</sup> About half of the characteristics which they have makes them unusually susceptible to conflict. They are distinguished from the authoritarian personality, which we will discuss later, in that their attitudes and difficulties reflect emotional disturbance rather than a mere personality predisposition or set.

There are several types of neuroses, depending on the characteristics which are most prominent. The type which is most conflict prone is what St. Clair calls the "expansive-aggressive" neurotic.<sup>3</sup> The American Psychiatric Association uses "obsessive-compulsive" to label the same symptom syndrome.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of our discussion, we will use the term "expansive-aggressive" since it seems to emphasize the neurotic characteristics which figure into a lot of social conflict. "Aggressive" describes the relentless neurotic drive, "Expansive" points to the desire for ever increased power and prestige to feed neurotic needs. Hereafter in the discussion, when we refer to the neurotic personality, we mean the expansive-aggressive type.

The neurotic's difficulty is lack of self-esteem. He unconsciously hates himself because he has no confidence in his abilities. He is constantly trying to prove himself in a very desperate way. To compensate for his sense of inadequacy, he dreams up a glorified self-

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<sup>2</sup>Robert James St. Clair, Neurotics In The Church (Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1963).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p.65.

<sup>4</sup>"Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders", American Psychiatric Association, Washington, 1952.

image which is all-loving, all-powerful, or all-wise. The loose ends of his life are truly held together by the self-styled idol which he imagines he is.<sup>5</sup>

As in the case of the authoritarian, the severe lack of self-esteem goes back to his up-bringing. Parents often give negative self-images to their children by constantly imposing "do's" and "don'ts". Sometimes parents belittle their youngsters by telling them they are incapable of doing right. At other times they cast reflections on their intelligence. Furthermore, parents often set high standards for their children's behavior and then tell them that their love and approval are dependent upon the children's perfection. Ellis says:

In raising children...we witting or unwittingly teach them... to accept several important propositions: (a) that they should be "good"; that it is disastrous if they are not "good"; (c) that they should try to win the love and approval of virtually everyone; and (d) that it is tragic if they fail to win the love and approval of even a single human being. If children are well indoctrinated with these premises and permitted to grow up without their being modified, they are virtually doomed to neurosis.<sup>6</sup>

When self-esteem is built upon the approval of others, which they are usually reluctant to give, there are compulsive actions to win it. A drive to win fame, to dominate, or to be an authority sometimes has its origin in this neurotic need for approval. Contrariwise when a person's self-esteem is built on self-acceptance, he can take the approval or disapproval of others in stride and not be unusually affected.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 112.    <sup>6</sup>Ellis, op. cit., p. 73.

The neurotic in church conflict. The expansive-aggressive neurotic has an urge to destroy whatever denies a union between his glorified self-image and his actual ego. He wants to rule or ruin in social relations and church deliberations. He sometimes disrupts meetings by challenging procedures, attacking others, or in some way attempting to dominate.<sup>7</sup>

If the neurotic person is not always the cause of conflict in the church, he is usually attracted to it and immediately becomes a partisan. Since he sees both power and safety in superiority, the expansive-aggressive person will try to master the situation by dominating it. While he feels insecure in the turbulence of conflict, he is challenged by it because it offers an opportunity to prove his glorified self-image. In church conflict, he often identifies his position with moral perfection and the "will of God". Therefore, he is beyond all criticism.<sup>8</sup> He glories in the fact that his cause is altogether righteous and that he has lost his life in complete dedication to it. In such a case, his critics become dangerous enemies to God's Kingdom. St. Clair says:

By some bewildering paradox, the neurotic pride in perfect humility...enables him to enter the sanctuary as a member of the privileged few....He is on mystically closer terms with God than the poor mass of Christians....He glories in the fact that he has lost his life. As a human being he is no more. The merger with the Spirit is complete, and he takes seriously Christ's injunction

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<sup>7</sup>H. Harry Giles, "The Tool Kit: Handling Controversy", Adult Leadership, II, 6 (November 1953), 19.

<sup>8</sup>Alfred Adler, What Life Should Mean To You (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1931), p. 61.

to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect.<sup>9</sup>

The neurotic treats his opponents in a vindictive manner. He is bent on retaliation, punishment, humiliation, and vengeance against his enemies who are working against God. Since their refusal to yield to his domination has torn at his glorified self-image and has injured his pride, then almost any measure is justified in either banishing them or bringing them to their knees. In such a circumstance, it is not uncommon for the neurotic to try to oust his opponents from an organization or the church.

If the neurotic is unable to bring his opponents around to his position or to drive them out, then he will probably withdraw in self-righteous contempt, or be compelled by his psychological nature to find some justification which will protect his glorified self-image. In the latter case, blame must be fixed on somebody or some impersonal factor in order to avoid self-hatred which he cannot abide. When a neurotic blames a person to save his own pride, he is apt to maintain a hatred for him across months or years. Any attempt at reconciliation is usually met with rebuff, for to be reconciled would mean that the psychological scape goat had disappeared, and the neurotic would be without any personal justification. In the few instances where reconciliation is consummated between a neurotic and his enemies, a new point of blame must be found to which all can direct an accusing attitude. In such a case, the neurotic's glorified self-image is

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<sup>9</sup>St. Clair, op. cit., p. 59.

still protected from self-abasement.

Help for neurotics. As long as neurotic people are around, they are likely to present problems in human relations within the church; this will be especially true if we give an inconsiderate reaction to their neurotic obsessions and compulsions. Since they are troublesome, we often have an urge to try to isolate them or to freeze them out of responsibility. When we respond to them in this manner, they tend to become even more frantic and desperate in their efforts to gain acceptance. If the principle difficulty of neurotic people is their negative attitude toward their inner beings, then the primary duty of the pastor and lay leaders is to help them achieve a more positive acceptance of themselves. If we can go behind their efforts to assert themselves and deal lovingly with their real egos, they will have far less anxiety and feel more secure in social relations. As C. W. Morris has pointed out:

We must realize...as they themselves so often do, that although their basic behavior patterns are quite unreasonable, they do have a right to the same opportunities as others within the church. When given such opportunities, without the unfavorable criticisms which so often arise, these people are indeed the people who "make the world go round". For it is obsessive-compulsive elements in "normal" personalities which so often spur on the heroes and educate the technicians.<sup>10</sup>

Efforts to help neurotic people in the church, therefore, should be channeled in two directions. First, a sympathetic and tolerant climate among the members for the behavior of neurotics should be created. If people understand and accept the obsessions, idiosyncra-

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<sup>10</sup>C. W. Morris, "The Terror of Good Works", Pastoral Psychology, VIII, 76, (September 1957), 28-29.

sies, scruples, attention getting devices, and compulsions, then the neurotics will tend to become more secure and less troublesome. The pastor can set an example in his own attitudes and reactions. If need be he can talk privately to some of his more understanding laymen to enlist their support in his efforts to attain more favorable environmental circumstances. He should encourage the laymen to utilize the neurotics' real talents in constructive church work. This will tend to give them a sense of worth and accomplishment. If the neurotics become too disruptive or authoritarian in their actions, they should be held in check by democratic procedures, but at the same time, with a deep concern for their inner beings.

If the approach described above is not successful, in and of itself, then it should be coupled with some type of counseling program wherein neurotic people can gain insight into their basic problems. Since neuroses are emotional disorders which can be greatly improved or eliminated by professional counseling, many churches are establishing counseling programs. Some are putting professional counselors, who have degrees in psychology, on their staffs. Others are going farther and actually setting up clinics with the aid of psychiatrists.

Many pastors have become interested in this field. Where they did not receive training in seminary to counsel people with emotional disturbances, they are taking courses and attending training conferences to become better able to help people in counseling situations. Many have received training in the techniques of group therapy and have organized groups in their churches for self-help through group

guidance. These have taken the form of enrichment groups, prayer groups, and therapy groups. Where pastors happen not to be trained for counseling persons with emotional problems, they usually have referral services ready at hand. Persons can often be directed to churches which do have counseling programs, or to family service clinics, consulting psychologists, and if the need is severe enough, to psychiatrists.

We should emphasize that neurotic behavior can be altered. When neurotic persons gain insight into their emotional disturbances and their causes, they often become free from fears of insecurity and set out on a path of building self-esteem through self-acceptance.

## II. THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY

A second major personality type which often figures into a conflict in the church is the authoritarian personality. It is characterized by developmental defects in the personality structure. An authoritarian feels little subjective anxiety and has no sense of distress, as does the neurotic personality which is deeply aware of inner conflicts. Lifelong patterns of behavior, rather than emotional symptoms, reveal the authoritarian. "An authoritarian person is one who has a closed orientation toward authority" or authorities.<sup>11</sup> He is one who on any given position selects a particular source of information, to validate opinions already held, and closes his mind to all

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<sup>11</sup>Milton Rokeach, "Authority, Authoritarianism, and Conformity", Conformity and Deviation, Irwin A. Berg and Bernard M. Bass (eds.), (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 234.

others which do not conform. In contradistinction, the antiauthoritarian, or equalitarian, is open-minded toward new understandings, insights, evidences, and considerations. T. W. Adorno and his colleagues made an epochal study of personal authoritarianism which was published in 1950.<sup>12</sup> Their purpose was to show the influence of psychological and sociological factors on the formation of individual ideology. Through extensive research, they were able to demonstrate a casual relation between these factors. Since then more than two hundred related studies and analyses have been published in periodicals and books, most of which seem to further substantiate their original findings. From all these studies we have come to a new awareness of the role of the authoritarian personality in human relations, and especially in social conflict.

Authoritarian behavior. While laymen have to be very careful in their estimates of people, a certain broad and coherent pattern can be recognized which identifies authoritarian personalities.<sup>13</sup> They invariably harbor strong underlying aggressive impulses. These have usually resulted from severe external restrictions being imposed on the satisfaction of ego needs during their formative years. When repressive methods are constantly used to punish and control children, they often grow up with a fear that they are impotent. They doubt either their mental ability, physical strength or personal charm.

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<sup>12</sup>T. W. Adorno, et al., The Authoritarian Personality (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950)

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 239



This inferiority complex usually leads them to over-compensate with unconscious attempts to prove their competence and power to themselves and others. Often they develop strong paranoid tendencies in which they have illusions of great power.<sup>14</sup> A real paranoid is capable of breaking forth in violence and attacking whatever challenges or denies his selfhood. Authoritarians, however, gain a sense of power through exercising control over their environment. They have a drive to dominate others and to do everything when they are members of an organization. They are impatient with obstacles and have an urge to instantaneous action.

Since authoritarian persons are basically unsure of themselves, they become rigid in their beliefs and convictions. Their sense of personal security is tied to ideas which they conceive to be fixed and unchangeable. Since this absoluteness of opinions is a defense mechanism for authoritarians, any attempt to disprove them, or break them down, is resolutely resisted. Anything which would prove that their ideas are false is a threat to their security. Therefore, they cleave to their positions as if they were absolute certainties. They accept in uncritical submission the dogmas and creeds which uphold conventionalized values, public opinion, and the thinking of prestige figures. Adorno says:

Submission to authority and lack of independence and of critical judgment tend to lead...toward being suggestible and

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<sup>14</sup>Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda (eds.), Studies In The Scope and Methods of "The Authoritarian Personality". (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954), p. 46.

gullible, as contrasted with autonomy....The social implications of a tendency on the part of the gullible person to fall easy prey to unsound and destructive political propaganda are obvious.<sup>15</sup>

Authoritarians are prejudiced and generally think in stereotyped terms of people who are at a distance from them socially. Persons in minority groups of one kind or another become faceless creatures upon whom they can project all that they unconsciously loath about themselves. They see them as weak, inadequate, ignorant, etc. Therefore, they reject people outside of their group and attempt to hold them at a distance in order that the members of the out group will not become identified as real persons and thus cease to be scape goats. On the other hand, they are biased toward members of their own group and generally have strong feelings of acceptance toward them, such as in a clan. Most authoritarians, therefore, find it easy to believe in conspiracies. They can project their fears onto a secret "control apparatus" which is always trying to emerge just beyond the periphery of their in-group.

Authoritarian personalities have a tendency to overemphasize the power motif in human relations. They are inclined to see people in weak-strong categories. They generally admire the "he-men" who have no sentimental side. They are likely to idolize successful business, community, or church leaders.<sup>16</sup> Drastic, tough, and harsh methods are usually accepted as necessary to deal with what they conceive to be intolerable evils.

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<sup>15</sup>Adorno, op. cit., p. 467.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

Authoritarians are more than likely to be legalistic. They are most often fascinated by rules, regulations, and "the letter of the law". Church constitutions and by-laws can become more than guides for them; they are apt to be inflexible dividers of right and wrong. Since they are unsure of themselves, they can find security in power structures which cannot be questioned. They can usually point to verse and paragraph in Roberts Rules or elsewhere to prove a point of order or procedure.

In the authoritarian's analysis, social and political issues are prone to be cast in axiomatic terms. The complicated issues of the day are likely to be reduced to elementary considerations. They tend to see things as black or white, and rarely in shades of gray. Therefore, points of contention are generally condemned as totally wrong or defended as altogether good. "They know the answer for everything and present to their partners in discussion the absolute security of those who have cut off the contacts by which any modification of their formula may occur".<sup>17</sup> They usually speak in absolute terms. Even when an issue can be shown to have a mixed pattern of values on both sides, they frequently continue to defend their opinion in dogmatic terms, for they are loath to admit error and change their estimate of problems.

James G. Ranck did research through the use of personality and religious ideological tests on eight hundred theology students to discover the relation between authoritarian personality and religious

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 619.

ideology. The findings were significant. He reports:

1. The more conservative that persons are in their religious ideology, the more they tend to exhibit prejudice against, and to reject, such outgroups as Negroes, Jews, and persons of other nations, and to idealize the corresponding ingroups. Conversely, the more liberal the religious ideology, the greater the rejection of both outgroup prejudices and ingroup idealization.

2. The more conservative persons are in their religious ideology, the more they exhibit such personality characteristics as authoritarian aggression and submission, conventionalism, identification with power figures, projectivity, punitiveness, and stereotypy. The more liberal the religious ideology, the less are such personality characteristics exhibited.

3. The more conservative persons are in their religious ideology, the more they emphasize discipline in child training, the dominant-assertive male, and the rigidly conventional female. Conversely, the more liberal the religious ideology, the greater the emphasis on self-expression, and the less on sex roles.<sup>18</sup>

The authoritarian and the creation of conflict. Authoritarian persons tend to create conflict in human relations. Paths of frustration, tension, and hostility are usually left in their wake because of the approaches, methods, and attitudes which they seemingly cannot avoid employing. For personal security, their unconscious sense of inadequacy demands stability in the environment. They have a compulsion either to control or escape every social situation in which they feel insecure. To control people usually means the suppression of their doubts, fears, and differences, and an insistence on their conformity to the authoritarian's ideas, opinions, and programs.

Severe infringement upon the personal freedom of people almost invariably sets off a chain of psychological reactions which spell

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<sup>18</sup>James G. Ranck, "Religious Conservatism-Liberalism and Mental Health" Wayne E. Oates (ed.), The Minister's Own Mental Health, (Great Neck, N.Y.: Channel Press, 1955), p. 67.

trouble. Suppression of the individual expression of others brings frustration, because the individual has a drive to do or say something, and he is not permitted to do so. The frustration is usually increased when the individual believes that what he has to say is an answer to the problem which is before the group, and he is not allowed to put forth his proposition nor to urge the group to try his solution.

It is commonly accepted that man's automatic reaction to frustration is aggressive behavior. Gordon Allport tells us, "It seems to be undeniably true that man's instinctive response to frustration is an aggressive assertiveness in some form".<sup>19</sup> This goes back to primitive ways of dealing with threats and dangers to one's security. A frustrated animal will fight his way out of a cornered position, attacking almost anything in his way. A man who is frustrated is likely to respond with an emotional reaction. His sympathetic nervous system comes into play. He has an urge to remove the object which is frustrating him.

When an authoritarian person frustrates people by circumscribing their behavior, he will probably suppress their aggressive reaction because he also does not allow them free expression. Therefore, their emotional reaction is compounded and smolders in unexpressed hostility toward the oppressor. Suppressed hostility is often apparent in people's behavior. One can usually sense when persons have suppressed feelings for they are apt to be expressionless and

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<sup>19</sup>Gordon W. Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954), p. 343.

find it hard to laugh naturally and talk freely. However, some people can successfully hide their covert feelings, and we are surprised when some seemingly inconsequential matter causes them to express their pent-up hostilities.

When an authoritarian suppresses aggressive behavior in others, he may successfully maintain an appearance of group harmony for a time, but if he continues to suppress their feelings in one frustrating situation after another, then the individuals being suppressed will eventually exhibit one of two other reactions. Either they will "deflect" their aggression to a substitute object, person, or group, or they will break out in hostile rebellion against the oppressor.

Deflected aggression usually results when a person either fears or respects the authority too much to rebel against it. Deflected hostility is what a husband sometimes expresses when he comes home from work after a frustrating day at the office, where possibly the boss has bawled him out, and then kicks the dog for jumping up on his clothes to greet him. Or perhaps he finds fault with his wife for preparing steak when he expected his favorite casserole. Sometimes the children are warned to stay out of the way when "Daddy's had a rough day".

Deflected hostility, which is sometimes described as "free floating", is generally discharged onto something or somebody who cannot retaliate.<sup>20</sup> A housewife recently told me of an exasperating

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<sup>20</sup>Robin M. Williams, Jr., "Religion, Value Orientation, and Intergroup Conflict", Readings In Social Psychology (New York: Holt, 1952), p. 52.

day's journey with the family in which the small children presented one problem after another. When they arrived home, the husband took the evening paper into the living room and sat down to read, leaving her to prepare the meal. While she was standing in front of the stove, she suddenly grasped a cooking utensil and beat it out of shape in an attack upon the range. After this she said she felt a lot better.

Deflected aggression frequently comes out in church affairs. Sometimes the hostility is created outside the church and is expressed in it. On other occasions, it is created in one part of the church and expressed in another. A frustrated woman might not dare attack the president of the Woman's Society, but she may find it easy to vent her hostility on the district president, or some other bureaucratic figure who cannot retaliate.

The authoritarian who continues to suppress people runs the risk of angry protests and open rebellion. Many church conflicts are initiated in this manner. Pent-up hostility is usually released in a crisis situation. An official board meeting in which the church's budget is suddenly revealed to be seriously in arrears would be an occasion when pent-up hostilities could be easily discharged.

If hostility is not reinforced with continued frustration, then it will be released through normal intercourse without disrupting human relations. Often friends listen to us as we pour forth our real feelings, or we wear off our aggressions through diversions or comedy. Physical exercise and sports offer release from tension. Religious confessions and prayers have been outlets for rivers of hostility.

The Psalmist often sang about his: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help....Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them."<sup>21</sup>

An emotionally mature person can absorb the hostile expressions of others without retaliating or reflecting their feelings. The difficulty is that all too many of us feel insecure in our own persons, and we are prone to react emotionally whenever anyone else expresses emotion. We may become parties to conflict because we have our own authoritarian tendencies.

Cultural sources of authoritarian personalities. If authoritarian personalities tend to create conflict, then it is important for us to know something of the social background which is most likely to produce this type of personality, in order to know what remedial approach should be taken. We have already seen that the direct cause of authoritarian personality formation is the home environment and more specifically the kind of parental treatment given children. A larger question has been researched to find whether this type of family background is more often found in certain educational and economic groups. The findings are significant.

Seymour M. Lipset has done extensive research into the cultural origins of authoritarianism which he reported in a study published in

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<sup>21</sup> Psalms 35:1-6.



1959.<sup>22</sup> The characteristics of the authoritarian personality which Adorno used in his hypothesis were: rigid adherence to conventional values and aggressive attitudes toward violators of them, uncritical submission to idealized moral authorities, strong prejudices and superstitions, assertion of strength and toughness, and generalized hostile attitudes expressed in cynicism and destructiveness.<sup>23</sup> Using these categories Lipset found that authoritarian personalities are most often found among people of a low economic status and less education. In summarizing his findings, he says:

...the lower-class individual is more likely to have been exposed to punishment, lack of love, and a general atmosphere of tension and aggression since early childhood, experiences which often produce deep-rooted hostilities expressed by ethnic prejudice, political authoritarianism, and chiliastic transvaluational religion. His educational attainment is less than that of men with higher socio-economic status, and his association as a child with others of similar background not only fails to stimulate his intellectual interests but also creates an atmosphere which prevents his educational experience from increasing his general social sophistication and his understanding of different groups and ideas.<sup>24</sup>

Lipset found that all these factors combine to produce in most lower class people an authoritarian view of social problems, political issues, religious faith, economic problems, international relations, and personal relationships. He explains it as follows:

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<sup>22</sup>Seymour Martin Lipset, "Democracy and Working-Class Authoritarianism", American Sociological Review. XXIV, 4 (August 1959)

<sup>23</sup>Adorno, op. cit., p. 228.

<sup>24</sup>Lipset, op. cit., p. 495

The social situation of the lower strata,...with low levels of education, predisposes them to view politics in simplistic and chiliastic terms of black and white, good and evil. Consequently, other things being equal, they should be more likely than other strata to prefer extremist movements which support easy and quick solutions to social problems and have a rigid outlook rather than those which view the problem of reform or change in complex and gradualist terms and which support rational values of tolerance.<sup>25</sup>

These findings would also seem to explain why it is apparently easier for people of these social strata to believe in conspiracies, to be suspicious of higher learning, and to have an impulsive desire for immediate action without critical reflection. Therefore, the large numbers of people from lower class ranks which join religious fundamentalist churches, political extremist groups, and racist organizations is not surprising. These findings also throw light on the coalition which often exists between religious and political fundamentalist organizations.

In a separate study carried out at Boston University, using a questionnaire to gather evidence, researchers found a definite correlation between cultural background and religious, social and political attitudes. Georgia Harkness summarizes it:

In three basic areas, nationalism and thinking on war and peace, economic factors and racial influence, the results of the MESTA questionnaire afford clear evidence of the hold - almost, but never quite, the dominance - of cultural environment. Cultural factors affect religious beliefs; they modify the ways in which religious beliefs are applied to social issues.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>26</sup>Georgia Harkness, The Methodist Church in Social Thought and Action - A Summary (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 109.

While figures on average income are not available for all the mainline Protestant Churches, they are for The Methodist Church. In the Boston research referred to above, it was found that Methodists in 1957 had an average family income of \$5,329 per year. This compares to \$4,687 which was the average family income in the general population during the same year. The median educational attainment was 12.4 years beyond kindergarten as compared to 10.8 for the general population.<sup>27</sup> It would be fairly safe to assume that there is not too much difference between the general economic status of Methodists and most of the other larger Protestant denominations. Therefore, we should expect to find somewhat fewer authoritarians in our midst. There should be, also, more readiness to accept teachings which are above the elemental, simple, and doctrinaire. But the very fact that teachings which critically analyze moral, ethical, and religious problems often create controversy is clear evidence that there are still authoritarians among us!

Since authoritarian attitudes and approaches are somewhat a result of cultural background, then education can modify them, at least to some degree.<sup>28</sup> Lipset finds that a lack of liberal education seems to be a cause in the perpetuation of authoritarianism from

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<sup>27</sup>S. Paul Schilling, "An Inquiry on the Beliefs of Methodists", Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective. Vol. 3, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 270.

<sup>28</sup>Seymour Martin Lipset, "Three Decades of the Radical Right-1962", The Radical Right, (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 342.

one generation to the next in families and groups.<sup>29</sup> As Christians we have another reason, therefore, for supporting higher education and the dissemination of enlightenment among all people. It will not only help make them better citizens, but better persons in all their relationships and associations.

In the local church, we should foster the same type of sympathetic understanding in the environment for authoritarians which we suggested as remedial for the neurotic personalities. Self-discovery groups can often help authoritarians gain insight into their personalities and attitudes. Friends and associates can sometimes offer helpful suggestions to them, if it is done with real concern for their well being. With increased insight into their behavioral patterns, authoritarians can often change their approach to problems and become more considerate and democratic toward others. We have an obligation to help them become more useful Christians, churchmen, and citizens.

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<sup>29</sup>Lipset, "Democracy...", p. 489

## CHAPTER III

### THE ROLE OF GROUPS IN CHURCH CONFLICT

From the time of the Christian Crusades down to the present, it has often been observed that whenever one group attempts to suppress another group, society suffers serious loss because no group nor combination of groups even approaches omniscience. Therefore, when one group suppresses another, it may be suppressing the very ideas, criticisms, and correctives which could give it a continued and relevant existence. Yet, this is a tendency frequently observed, both in the church and out. When it does occur, frustration pervades the suppressed group. Consequently, it gives a corporate reaction very much like that of a frustrated individual; aggressive behavior. Conflict is the result.

Identification with a group is one of the most important relations persons have in the course of a lifetime. Groups have tremendous influence upon us, and we in turn often have influence upon groups. Krech says:

...groups and organizations catch up each one of us; and no matter what our weaknesses and strengths, predilections and aversions, each of us is influenced and constrained by our groups. Each of us also helps form and re-form our groups.<sup>1</sup>

Our personal beliefs and ideologies are often changed by the groups to which we belong. A study was carried out at Bennington College to ascertain what was determinative in forming the social philosophies of

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<sup>1</sup>David Krech, et al., Individual In Society (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), p. 383.

the students. Girls with conservative backgrounds were analyzed. The ones which became a part of a college group which had a liberal attitude toward minorities, social problems, etc., tended to liberalize their own views. Those girls who remained anchored to their home environment, old friends or conservative groups continued to be conservative in their social philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Individuals most often participate in church and community activities as members of groups. What is more important for our subject, individuals frequently become parties to conflict because the group to which they belong has become involved. As soon as they learn of a challenge to the group's status, position, or opinion, they, as well as other members of the group, are apt to come to its defense, and if need be, go on the offensive. Such is the nature of group relationships.

### I. GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

Groups are comprised of persons who are dependent on one another in certain ways and who have specific roles in relationship to one another. This interdependent association has a set of common values and goals.<sup>3</sup> When an individual is an integral part of a group, he receives certain values from it in terms of self-fulfillment, and he gives a part of himself in return: his admixations, concern, loyalty, and a part of his personal freedom. The values which an individual

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<sup>2</sup>Carolyn Sherif and Muzaffer Sherif, Groups In Tension and Harmony (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 219.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

receives in return include: a sense of identification and belonging, recognition and prestige, and protection from external threats to his status and position. Krech writes:

While the power want characterizes many people, the desire to belong to some activity or group larger than one's self, to be "accepted", to be a part of something significant, characterizes most people in society....The feeling of group belongingness importantly determines the individual's feeling of self-worth.... It is inevitable that the group identifications of the individual become an important part of his extended self....The groups of the individual become "my groups right or wrong" and attacks upon them may be defended as vigorously as attacks upon the self.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, when identification with a group is rooted in psychological needs, as it usually is, then any attack upon the group is an attack upon individuals in it, for their personalities are extended through it like tentacles.

Every group comes into existence as a mechanism to fulfill certain individual needs, either consciously or unconsciously expressed.<sup>5</sup> Groups can be categorized by the values they uphold, the needs they fulfill, and the goals they define: social, religious, occupational, scholastic, recreational, etc. A group does not always fulfill the identical personal needs of individuals in it. In a church group one person may find his religious needs filled, while another person receives recognition to boost his self-esteem. A group may also change categories by starting out as a religious group in which it primarily fulfills religious needs, and then later shifting to become fundamentally a social group with a new orientation in its program of needs fulfillment. For this reason, names sometimes betray the real

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<sup>4</sup>Krech, op. cit., p. 394.    <sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 398.

nature of groups.

The means by which a group attempts to uphold its values and to reach its goals are called group "norms".<sup>6</sup> They define the reciprocal obligations, duties, standards of behavior, and loyalties expected. The values, beliefs, goals, and norms which a group holds comprise its ideology.<sup>7</sup> A closely knit group will demand strict conformity to its ideology. A member who takes his obligations lightly will be disciplined or even expelled if his disloyalty has to do with the primary goals of the group. The Sherifs explain:

The pressures for conformity to group norms and goals are exerted through both positive and negative measures. Conformity is approved, encouraged, and rewarded in many ways. Nonconformity is viewed with disfavor, disapproval. Depending on the importance of the norm to the group and the degree of deviation, nonconformity is reacted to with various corrective and even coercive measures: ridicule, scorn, silent treatment, ostracism, actual punishment....<sup>8</sup>

The various degrees of conformity which groups are able to achieve accounts for the relative organizational strength and weaknesses between different groups of even the same kind.

Individuals often engage in behavior as members of groups which they would not otherwise do acting alone. Benjamin Spock, testifying on domestic relations before a judiciary committee in California, illustrated this point by describing how people who attend organizational conventions in distant cities sometimes engage in rather unconventional behavior, morally speaking, because the ingroup approves

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<sup>6</sup>Sherif, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>7</sup>Krech, op. cit., p. 402.

<sup>8</sup>Sherif, op. cit., p. 186.



it whereas the neighbors back home probably would not. However, from a positive standpoint, groups often inspire individuals to rise above inadequate personal standards or relatively low values which they may have received in their family background. This is frequently seen as one of the influences of a religious group.

Church groups. Church groups have the general characteristics common to other groups. Their distinctiveness is found in their ideology. Paul Tillich says the ultimate values of Christians should be truth, beauty, and love. These values should be at the top of the pyramid of loyalties and all other subsidiary values should be related to these ultimates. But church groups are apt to differ in their interpretation of what comprises ultimate values and they, also, differ in the values which they elevate to a place of ultimacy.

Some church groups give only scant attention to ultimate values. Their ideology is formed on a much lower plane. At times they elevate to a place of ultimate consideration: budgets, schedules, building programs, and events, such as suppers, rummage sales, and bazaars. These values doubtless have their place in church groups but we would not expect to find them at the apex of their loyalties. The degree to which church groups frequently go afield from ultimate religious values is evidenced by the embarrassment which members sometimes feel when they are expected to give a devotional, lead in prayer, or even bow in silent prayer.

Most church groups are formal organizations such as men's clubs, women's societies, and youth associations. Their formal ideologies are usually spelled out in the constitution and by-laws of the organiza-

tions and are, at least, copied after a parent model from the denominational headquarters. The extent to which local chapters are loyal to the formal ideology spelled out for them varies from one group to another. A national church women's organization has to work diligently to keep local groups focused on the penultimate value of the missionary enterprise for which they were organized.

Church groups which are somewhat less formal in their ideologies are fellowship, recreational, and service organizations, such as couples clubs, senior citizens groups, and bridge clubs. If such groups have constitutions and by-laws, they usually have little to say in relating the activities of the groups to ultimate values. Since some of them are primarily social in nature, group norms include scarcely more than the ability to tease and be teased and to converse about sports, styles, or the latest movies. These groups frequently have little if any depth in Christian ideology and are quite closely knit as in-groups; therefore, they are more susceptible to conflict with the church at large over social issues related to ultimate religious values. They would, also, appear to be more vulnerable to external references, or outside ideological influences than church groups which spend a considerable time studying the implications of their Christian ideals. We will discuss the workings of external influences presently.

Group prejudice. All groups tend to draw distinguishable lines between their in-group, ie., their members, and out-groups, ie., outsiders. Furthermore, the more closely in-group persons are identified with one another, the stronger they tend to see out-groups in

stereotyped negative images and to have hostile attitudes toward them.<sup>9</sup> This tendency is often observed between competitive high schools where there are strong in-group feelings. This inclination is the origin of what social scientists call ethnocentrism, the emotional attitude that one's group, race, religion or culture is superior to all others. Actually, ethnocentric groups generally feel threatened, at least unconsciously, by out-groups, and such fears enter into their estimate of others. Adorno says:

A primary characteristic of ethnocentric ideology is the generality of outgroup rejection. It is as if the ethnocentric individual feels threatened by most of the groups to which he does not have a sense of belonging; if he cannot identify, he must oppose; if a group is not "acceptable", it is "alien". The ingroup - outgroup distinction thus becomes the basis for most of his social thinking, and people are categorized primarily according to the groups to which they belong.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1920's, E. S. Bogardus devised a scale to measure the degree of ethnocentrism or prejudice in a group. It measures "social distance" by testing attitudes toward various national, racial, and religious groups. Individuals are asked if they would accept certain others to close kinship by marriage, as personal friends, as neighbors, as fellow tradesmen, as citizens, as visitors to the country, or if they would exclude them completely.<sup>11</sup> Groups vary in the social distance at which they hold certain other groups. By erecting social

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<sup>9</sup>T. W. Adorno, et al., The Authoritarian Personality (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), p. 150.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 147.

<sup>11</sup>S. Stansfeld Sargent, Social Psychology (New York: Ronald Press, 1950), p. 452.

barriers, members of in-groups avoid becoming personally acquainted with members of out-groups. Minority persons remain faceless individuals upon whom they can project "bad" qualities, usually the ones they like least about themselves. Any effort to break down barriers and bridge distances is met with resistance, or even violence, as in some of the "kneel-in" cases where Negroes attended white worship services.

Prejudice in church groups. Church people and groups are among the most prejudiced in our society. Several investigations by social scientists have disclosed that churchmen may be considerably more prejudiced than the non-churched segment of the population.<sup>12</sup> This is partially due to the fact that a great amount of religious teachings tend to support prejudicial concepts. Ideas of being the "chosen people", the "elected", and the "saved" draw a rather marked contrast between the in-group with its graces and virtues and the out-group with its depraved nature, sins, and reprobation. Allport gives an interesting illustration of this point:

A certain child, let us say is taught the usual adult complex of ideas. Christ came into the world to save all men - black, brown and white - but dreadful things will happen if any but a white man should move into the neighborhood. He is taught that his family's church is the best and that all others are inferior. He learns that the Heavenly Father grants favors when asked, but especially to a child who belongs to the elect....his background prepares him for the same type of reasoning that has marked bigotry throughout the course of history: "God is partial to me.... Since God is created in my image, His role is to confer security ...upon me...barring from my presence out-groups, which threaten my comfort. My religion and my prejudice both serve my

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<sup>12</sup>Gordon W. Allport, "Religion and Prejudice", Personality and Social Encounter (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 264.

exclusionist style...."<sup>13</sup>

Allport says that whether or not religion confirms and upholds prejudice depends on the type of religious teachings. Some religious teachings are inclusive in nature, challenge narrow concepts of the human family, and bring these broadening influences down into practical situations. However, it seems that this more enlightened type of religious understanding is less widespread and has had less effect on church people than the former.

Roger Ragan did research into the extent of prejudice among church members for his doctoral dissertation at the Southern California School of Theology at Claremont. Using data from 266 respondents to questionnaires sent to nine Methodist Churches in the Los Angeles area, he found considerable racial intolerance among the white suburbanite Methodists. The study revealed that about seventy-five per cent of the respondents were prejudiced against Negroes, and a majority did not favor the church taking aggressive social action on the problem. The study revealed that the degree of prejudice which churchmen have is inversely related to their involvement in the program of the church and the degree to which they have internalized the Christian ideology.<sup>14</sup> The results of the Ragan study can be loosely compared with the election returns on a constitutional amendment to

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Roger Ragan, "Attitudes of White Methodist Church Members In Selected Los Angeles Metropolitan Area Churches" (unpublished Th. D. dissertation, Southern California School of Theology, Claremont, Calif., 1963).

outlaw fair housing legislation in California. It was passed in a general election in the fall of 1964 with approximately sixty-six per cent of the voters opposed to fair-housing.

Prejudice among church people is generally perpetuated because members who are loosely identified with the church follow the inclinations of their cultural backgrounds rather than the teachings of the church leadership. Challenges to such deep in-group feelings and prejudice towards out-groups, which seem to be a part of the prevailing ideology of some church groups, cause a considerable amount of controversy and conflict in the church. When prejudiced members are confronted with the church's insistence on the Christian ideal of an inclusive church and society, they often have a profound sense of guilt. This guilt complex can express itself in strong negative reactions to the church's program and reenforce ideological differences where they exist. Many of the church conflicts which are now occurring have their origin in this dilemma of Christian people: on the one hand, the ideals of their faith call for unreserved brotherhood; on the other hand, many of their group norms and practices tend to deny it. Therefore, it is a conflict which we cannot and do not want to avoid, if we are committed to the broader implications of the Christian faith, but which we resolve to make as creative as possible.

## II. REFERENCE GROUPS

When individual members internalize the values and norms of a group, it is henceforth said to be their "reference group", since they refer to it for certain standards of behavior, attitudes, and

opinions.<sup>15</sup> In such a case, the group ideology becomes the personal outlook of individual members, by which they interpret much of their experience both in and out of the group. Their thinking on many issues is greatly influenced by group consensus. Therefore, the groups to which people are most closely identified serve as their authority in ethics, morality, politics, economic theory, or most any other subject which is important to them. Furthermore, these anchorages tend to determine people's behavioral patterns out in life when they are away from the group. A woman looking at a display window on the street is likely to see it through the eyes of her reference group: what will the others think of this style or that?

The church throughout its history has endeavored to be the ideological reference for its members. Indeed, until the Renaissance and the Reformation, it controlled virtually every aspect of its members' lives, circumscribing them with innumerable restrictions, regulations, prohibitions, and laws. The human spirit finally demanded its freedom from such strictures. The ideas of a free society were born wherein people can voluntarily associate themselves with whatever influence they desire. We rejoice in the tradition of freedom which this revolution has passed on to us. In our free society, men of necessity come under a multiplicity of influences. Everywhere groups of many kinds are offering themselves as references. They are working to expand their memberships and influence. Such competition makes it

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<sup>15</sup>Gardner Murphy, An Outline of Social Psychology (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), p. 175.

imperative that the church be efficient, learned, thorough, and dedicated in its teachings and work. A large part of the mission of the church is to increase the degree to which members, as well as people outside the church, are willing to look to it as a source of authority in social ethics, morality, and religious philosophy, and to structure their value systems on its teachings.

The church has had a certain measure of success in the recent past, it is evident, in influencing the lives and thoughts of its members. The study which was carried out at Boston University, and to which we have referred in an earlier chapter, examined "Methodists in Social Thought and Action". The MESTA survey, as it is called, found that seventy-five per cent of Methodists said they were influenced by their church's teachings with regard to foreign economic and technical aid and questions of peace and war. Eighty per cent said they had received guidance concerning alcohol problems and the evils of segregation. This personal evaluation of the influence of the church in their lives was borne out by the answers which they gave to specific questions concerning issues on which the church had taken a stand.<sup>16</sup> This finding is not necessarily in conflict with the studies of Allport, Ragan, and others to which we have already referred, and in which prejudice was found to be a substantial factor in church groups. Segregation is an extreme form of social injustice to which

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<sup>16</sup>S. Paul Schilling, "An Inquiry on the Beliefs of Methodists", Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 285.



persons with mild amounts of racial prejudice might be opposed. Indeed, it is conceivable that some persons justify a certain amount of social distance by opposing extreme forms of prejudice. Nevertheless, an absolute majority of Methodists in this sample have said they are influenced by the church in their analysis of these important issues. However, this leaves a sizable minority, from twenty to twenty-five per cent, which indicates the church does not serve as its reference regarding these areas of concern. If these people are not influenced by external references, then they are certainly vulnerable to them.

External reference in the church. Frequently, church members receive their reference for authority in matters of social concern from groups and sources outside the church. We will more thoroughly analyze the contents of ideological conflicts in the church which result from external references in the next chapter. If church members belong, as they often do to certain veterans' organizations, extremist study groups, or racist organizations, they will often find the ideologies of these groups to be at variance with that of the mainline Protestant Churches. Not only so, the church and these organizations frequently demand contradictory action with regard to social or political problems. Veterans groups, for example, usually have as a part of their norms that persons in them work for ever greater outlays of armaments, while many church groups have disarmament as a part of their social action program. Murphy says:

Many a person today necessarily moves in multiple groups which may and do place different and contradictory demands on him. They tend to pull him in different directions to arouse different and

even contradictory values, loyalties, conformities and aspirations.<sup>17</sup>

When a person is in two different reference groups which require opposing responses from him, he usually becomes marginal to the norms of both, i.e., somewhat neutral, or he swings his loyalty primarily to one and becomes hostile toward the other. Sometimes this latter behavior can be observed in the person who is attending an extremist study group which stresses policies of "total victory" in international relations and who becomes aggressive toward the church which stresses peace, brotherhood and reconciliation.

Occasionally persons in the church who have an external reference for their social philosophy become convinced that there are internal "enemies" in the church which are leading it along the road to Communism. According to their extremist sources of information, Communist sympathizers or subversives are writing the church's educational material and publications. For example, John Stormer in his widely distributed book, None Dare Call It Treason, alleges that certain church school lessons are written by persons who are "soft" on Communism with the result that "many Methodists were misled or had their concern about communism dulled".<sup>18</sup> Many people are persuaded by such irresponsible claims, even though Dr. Henry M. Bullock, editor of Methodist church school publications, has pointed out that the author of the church school lessons under attack, Dr. Creighton Lacy,

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<sup>17</sup> Murphy, op cit., p. 176.

<sup>18</sup> John A. Stormer, None Dare Call It Treason (Florissant, Mo.: Liberty Bell Press, 1964), p. 129.

was a missionary in China when the Communists took over in 1949. His father, also a missionary, was under Communist arrest for a year before he died of a heart condition, but, nevertheless, as something of a martyr. The lesson which Lacy wrote was entirely anticommunist. Such slanderous charges also confuse a lot of churchmen who receive their reference for authority on social issues from the church. Many ask their pastors if these things can be true.

When there are persons in the church with reference in "radical rightist" groups, the members of the church, and especially a pastor, who strongly support the church's official program of social concern are liable to become suspect. Sometimes an attack is mounted against the pastor, or members who support the church's program, in the local church's official bodies or committees. When such external reference "infiltrates" a group in the church, church conflict touching on these matters is intensified many fold, for an entire group becomes involved in the conflict. Some church members then become parties to the conflict because they belong to a certain group within the church, and whatever their group norms demand they tend to accept as right. Previous associations, attachments, and animosities to other persons and groups also tend to predispose the manner in which they respond to conflict.<sup>19</sup> When one group becomes involved in a conflict, then those who have existing feelings toward that group are likely to become involved, on one side or the other, depending upon whether their feelings are positive or negative.

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<sup>19</sup>James S. Coleman, Community Conflict (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957), p. 18.

Groups which are very strong in mutual attachments have less internal conflict because both the personal involvement of its members and the high frequency of interaction cause them to suppress their differences. In such a closely knit group, they also develop mutual appreciations and ways of working through their difficulties. Yet, when conflict does occur, it is very severe due to the suppressed hostilities and the very closeness of relationships.<sup>20</sup>

We might expect conflict inspired by extremism to be completely disrupting to the church, but such is not always the case. On the contrary, in many instances the majority of the members and officials go on the defensive and pull together as never before. They become aware of the issues at stake, and often become well informed on the official social action program of the church. They come to think of the extremists in the church as irrational trouble-makers, threats to unity, and deserters of the values which the church upholds. In some cases where extremist members have been incorrigible and unwilling to be a part of a creative minority in the church, they have been reprimanded and even expelled by local official bodies.

If persons in the church who have an extremist reference group do not cause trouble within the groups, boards, or committees of the local church, they may report the church's social actions and programs to their reference group and an attack be waged by it in the community at large. In such a case, rumor, smear, innuendo and character

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<sup>20</sup>Lewis A. Coser, The Functions of Social Conflict (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956), p. 152.

assassination are the methods usually employed. Printed sheets and pamphlets which denounce the church leaders' "communist sympathy and connections" are sometimes published and passed out to people gathering for worship or other meetings.

In some cases, persons with external social reference gain control of a local church's program and are able to nullify the official program of the denomination in the local church. In this case the minister is usually silenced or driven from the church and a more favorable one obtained. This has been true in many local churches in the Southern region of the country where the official racial policies and programs of the larger denominations have met with outright resistance. The Galloway Methodist Church in Jackson, Mississippi, is an example which has been well publicized where the lay leadership of the local church has been in open rebellion against the official program of social concerns of the denomination.

Orientating church groups. The church should do all it can to keep the organizations and groups in it from drifting afield in their interests and ideologies. This should be done, not through authoritarian control, of course, but through a constant program of education on the goals and objectives of Christian fellowships. Effort should be directed toward getting the various groups in the church to relate their norms to the core interests and ideology of the church. The initiations of such a program will require a lot of self-study, soul searching, and analyzing of goals, objectives, programs, and activities. Those things which cannot be related to the ultimate values of truth, beauty, and love should be omitted from the norms of church

groups. This is in no sense a narrow concept but gives a broad range in the establishment of goals, objectives, and programs. Such examination of our purposes keeps calling the groups, one and all, back to the fundamental reasons for the church's existence. Groups which share the church's ideology are far less prone to contribute to conflict within the congregation.

The primary purpose of preaching and of Christian education is the continual redefinition of Christian ideology, with the end in view that members will more completely dedicate themselves to it. Where such teaching is reasonable, thought provoking and challenging, it will be affective in giving people a sense of Christian mission and purpose. Where it is vague, trite, and illogical, it will leave people, and through them their groups, to form their ideologies on other grounds.

Relationships within the church should not be exclusively with one group or the other. Cross-membership among groups considerably reduces the likelihood of their becoming involved in conflict as a group. Where persons tend to participate in only one group, then a sociometric diagram of membership lines for various groups looks like so many separate eggs in a basket. In such a case, the demarcation lines for potential conflict are already drawn. But where many individuals have loyalties in several groups within the church, membership lines look like a bowl of spaghetti. These cross loyalties serve to lessen the possibility of groups becoming parties to conflict. Therefore, it would seem the better part of wisdom to leave no groups in the church closed and to themselves. Group membership should be

open and spread as widely as is consistent with the group's general purposes.

## CHAPTER IV

### IDEOLOGICAL FACTORS INVOLVED IN CHURCH CONFLICT

The involvement of organized religion in the fields of social and political action during the last three or four decades has been the source of much controversy on denominational levels and of innumerable conflicts in local churches. This involvement has increased in recent years for church leaders have seen the issues more clearly drawn and some feel that the church's future usefulness is dependent upon its ability to help fill the appalling needs of mankind in social relations and social necessities.<sup>1</sup> This activity has caused a growing misunderstanding between many laymen and between them and the leadership of the church which must be brought into the open and discussed freely, for to suppress such issues is to push them out where the extremists can capitalize on their explosive powers for their own ends.

Fundamental to the conflicts over the church's involvement in these matters is a difference in both religious and social philosophy which is found in most religious groups. Those of a more conservative, evangelical faith tend to think Christianity should be concerned with personal morality and little more. Frequently, beginning with a different theological orientation, others believe the Christian ethic should be extended beyond individual morality to include the conditions which make for social justice, for freedom from want, disease and

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<sup>1</sup>Leroy Davis, "The Clergy-Laity Schism", Christian Century, LXXXI, 48 (November 25, 1964) 1455-6.



ignorance, and for the development of men's talents and abilities as children of God. This latter Christian philosophy asserts that every man has a place under the sun and should be able to stand there with dignity.

If these philosophical differences were of little consequence, they could be discussed among churchmen, somewhat as differences are debated among disputants in London's Hyde Park. There would be controversy but little else. But much more is involved. Religious philosophy which is often related to economic interests and social power provides the ideological basis for the policies and programs of the church. The prevailing religious and social philosophies determine the type of activities and social goals which are supported. The church conceives its tasks and defines its goals in terms of its philosophy. When a philosophy gains control of organizational power, it has attained the means by which it can determine the ideology, official or unofficial, of an organization. Therefore, the struggle which is occurring in many churches involves fundamental philosophical differences, as well as the power structures by which ideologies are established and maintained.

In discussing social conflict, Harry Giles has described precisely the point at which the issues are joined in the ideological conflict in the churches. He writes:

An organization's existence depends upon its policy -- upon an expression of its purposes, values and general character. Policy means directional principles, major strategies, value judgment.... Policy, written or unwritten, guides the officers and members of an organization in carrying out their functions. An organization will attract or lose members on the basis of its policy....Policy will influence its methods of work and determine the extent of its

strength.<sup>2</sup>

The question which is causing conflict over social issues in the church is, what religious and social philosophy should determine the policies and programs of the church? We are not likely to answer this question to everyone's satisfaction, but perhaps we can clarify the issues and throw some light on the various influences which are being brought to bear on the church.

The spectrum of attitudes which people have with regard to the desirability of social change is usually described in liberal-conservative categories. The conservative point of view endeavors to maintain the status quo. Reaction, which is the extreme form of conservatism, would reestablish policies which preceded the status quo. The liberal point of view favors moderate change as circumstances seem to warrant. Radicalism is an extreme form of liberalism. It favors immediate and sweeping changes in the order of things.<sup>3</sup> Each of these ways of resisting or favoring change has come to be identified with one or more schools of thought.

# I. THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

Rightly understood theological liberalism cannot be identified with only one school of thought. It is a method and approach to knowledge rather than a restricted body of doctrine. It is free and

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<sup>2</sup>H. Harry Giles, "The Tool Kit: Handling Controversy", Adult Leadership, II, 6 (November 1953), 18.

<sup>3</sup>S. Stansfeld Sargent, Social Psychology (New York: Ronald Press, 1950), p. 415.

open-minded in its search for truth. It reflects the spirit of modern science which preceded it in the quest for objective knowledge.

Modern science, with its emphasis on investigative processes, and the renunciation of conclusions arrived at purely through speculation, altered orthodox views concerning the nature of authority for truth and the uses of this authority. Science rejected divinely revealed authority as the source of understanding the world and nature on which the church had founded all its doctrines and teachings concerning the moral life. In place of this theory of knowledge, science substituted the authority of established facts, proven consequences, and insights gained from testing and retesting by a scientific method which aimed at reducing error in assumptions. The new science taught people to ask questions, to demand proof, and to look for evidence, instead of accepting matters purely on the authority of an established institution.

Liberal Christianity was one of the outgrowths of the world view spawned by modern science. Included in this view was a new understanding of creation through evolutionary processes, of the history of man and the myths which he has believed, and of the nature of God and man.

Another source of Christian liberalism were the appalling needs in the twentieth century's new urban society. A new and broader application of Christianity was needed instead of its previous "stand-off" attitude toward the larger issues in social living. Vast slums, with related social evils and injustices, abounded and were increasing. Ignorant immigrants flooded into the cities from foreign lands. They

were often the recipients of discrimination and mistreatment. The inequitable distribution of wealth, with a few monopolies controlling the economy, while the bulging ranks of the lower classes were in relative poverty, called for action and preachment against it. The need for wage and hour laws and prohibitions against child labor aroused perceptive Christian minds to protagonism.

It is small wonder that these influences led to a social interpretation of Christianity and undergirded what came to be called the social gospel. Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist, published his Christianity and the Social Crisis in 1907 followed by Christianizing the Social Order in 1912. These marked the beginning of a truly Christian social philosophy. Many others, such as Francis McConnell and Harry E. Fosdick, led in preaching and applying the social gospel to the policies and programs of the church. It has since been a relevant part of Protestantism. The Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches said in 1948:

The insistent task which confronts the church in modern society is to help to provide ethical guidance for collective decisions and actions. Without such guidance the relations between groups must degenerate into a struggle of naked power....There is no more urgent need than for the supplementation of an ethic for the individual by a morality of group action....Unless they are enabled to see a connection between this working morality and the Christian faith, Christianity will seem to have little significance for life in this world.<sup>4</sup>

Christian existentialism is the newest theology which is challenging the orthodoxies of the past. It places more emphases on

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<sup>4</sup>World Council of Churches, Amsterdam, 1948. Man's Disorder and God's Design, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), p. 136.

the present human situation than on the historical revelation of God to man. It grapples with the meaning and meaninglessness of existence. It stresses man's profound anxiety and inner distress because of his estrangement from True Being. It says man needs to act in faith to counter-act the encroachment of meaninglessness into his inner being. When man's inner being is united with True Being, or God, then non-being is defeated in his life in that particular instance. There is a constant struggle between Being and Non-being on the battleground of man's soul. Self-fulfillment is realized when True Being is dominant in the inner life.

Christian existentialism calls for a reappraisal of orthodox doctrines. Bishop A. T. Robinson's Honest To God, which was written from an existentialist theological point of view, caused a stir throughout the Christian world with its proposal to do away with the concept of a personal God:

...such a God is constantly pushed further and further back as the tide of secular studies advances. In science, in politics, in ethics the need is no longer felt for such a stop-gap or long-stop; he is not required in order to guarantee anything, to solve anything, or in any way to come to the rescue.<sup>5</sup>

James A. Pike, California's Episcopal bishop, created wide reaction to a sermon he preached in St. Louis in which he urged a reexamination and redefinition of "outdated, incomprehensible and nonessential" church doctrines such as the idea of the Holy Trinity. He is reported to have said that "ecclesiastical rigidity" on minor theological considerations was obscuring the "heart of the message"

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<sup>5</sup>John A. T. Robinson, Honest To God (Philadelphia:Westminster Press, 1963), p. 37.

and preventing many people from becoming members in a day when Christianity is losing ground.<sup>6</sup> Equally controversial and in the same vein are the conclusions of Bishop Pike's book, A Time For Christian Candor.<sup>7</sup>

While Christian existentialism challenges many of the conventional moral precepts of orthodoxy, it affirms the ethic of love as the measure of the moral life. Paul Tillich, a leading exponent of this theology, writes:

...the religious source of the moral demands is love under the domination of its agape quality, in unity with the imperative of justice to acknowledge every being...as a person, being guided by the divine-human wisdom embodied in the moral laws of the past, listening to the concrete situation, and acting courageously on the basis of these principles.<sup>8</sup>

The end of the moral life is the fulfillment of persons. Evils are those elements which tear men from his true being. Good are those values which help man come into his own. "The moral imperative is the command to become what one potentially is, a person within a community of persons".<sup>9</sup> The law of love compels one to consider the well being of others along with his own. Elsewhere Tillich traces the ethic of love back through its Biblical origins to the community setting of the

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<sup>6</sup>Los Angeles Times, October 12, 1964, Part I, p. 2., Col. 3.

<sup>7</sup>James A. Pike, A Time For Christian Candor (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

<sup>8</sup>Paul Tillich, Morality and Beyond (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 45.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p. 19.

Garden of Eden.<sup>10</sup>

Christian social action. Social concern has steadily grown in the Protestant Churches of America since the turn of the century when the Federal Council of Churches adopted the Social Creed which several denominations appropriated about the same time. This resulted from the influence of liberal theology and a willingness to re-examine previous doctrines and positions. Most of the Protestant Churches now have large departments of social concerns with professional staffs which carry on programs of education and action.

Several of the Protestant Churches maintain rather large offices in our nation's capital and a ten million dollar Church Center has been erected across the street from the United Nations in New York City to aid the churches in carrying out a program of education for peace, disarmament and international cooperation. Much of the mission work of the churches in foreign lands is of a social nature. Indeed most of it is tied with economic relief, medicine, agriculture, or education.

Social action on the part of churches will undoubtedly increase in the days ahead. Such books as Martin E. Marty's Second Chance For American Protestants call for a deeper relevance of religion to life and a greater involvement of the church in the affairs of social living.<sup>11</sup> New challenges are seen by many observers. Leroy Davis

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<sup>10</sup>Paul Tillich, Biblical Religion and The Search For Ultimate Reality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 44-46.

<sup>11</sup>Martin E. Marty, Second Chance for American Protestants (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

wrote following the political campaign of 1964:

It would appear that we have entered an era in which many principles contrary to those of Christianity are to be given the sanction of a major political ideology. This means that Christians are going to have to meet demands and responsibilities associated with partisan politics. Basic to Christianity is a certain social consciousness that includes convictions about the oneness of humanity; the need for intelligent and loving concern and action; the willingness to share and, if necessary, to carry the burdens of other persons and even nations; a strong judgment against selfishness; and the obligation to assist those who are less fortunate. These concerns come into the open when the issues of life...are the subject of relevant preaching and theologizing, but when this happens the gospel is thrust immediately into the maelstrom of political concern and emotion.<sup>12</sup>

As ministers and church leaders launch into these concerns they will no doubt have the support of the majority of their members. The MESTA survey conducted by Boston University found that a majority of Methodists feel their ministers should be free to speak out and take positions on social issues which they regard as Christian.<sup>13</sup>

## II. CONSERVATIVE THEOLOGY

Theological liberalism and its related social concern met, and still must contend with, strong resistance in the church from many members, leaders, and theologians. Since liberalism was seen as a deadly threat to orthodox doctrines concerning the Bible, a stubborn reaction developed. Just before the turn of the century the Niagara

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<sup>12</sup>Davis, op. cit., p. 1455.

<sup>13</sup>Georgia Harkness, The Methodist Church in Social Thought and Action - A Summary (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 109.



Bible Conference listed six fundamentals which have come to be regarded as the cardinal points of conservative or "Fundamentalist" theology. They are: the infallibility of the scriptures, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the sacrificial blood atonement of Christ's death, the bodily resurrection, and the second coming of Christ. A series of twelve pamphlets entitled The Fundamentals was published in 1910-12. They were written by authors who upheld a strict, literalistic interpretation of the Bible and shunned the findings of new scholarship. The tenets of faith propounded by these writings were accepted by many as being the sole and final definition of the meaning of Christianity and the Christian life. They came to regard all who disagreed with them as unchristian.<sup>14</sup>

Fundamentalist leaders have frequently become quite hostile in their attacks on liberal theology and its social concern. In San Francisco during a political contest over fair housing laws, the ministers of The Conservative Ministerial Association of the Bay Area published a statement which said that, "...individual property rights are set forth in the Ten Commandments" and that churchmen who worked for fair housing were advocating "not only an anti-Christian social gospel but also a socialist standard of morality".<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, we can conclude that fundamentalism has its own

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<sup>14</sup>S. Paul Schilling, "An Inquiry on the Beliefs of Methodists", Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective. Vol. 3., (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 85-86.

<sup>15</sup>Pasadena Star News, October 27, 1964, Sec. I, p. 4, col. 1.

social and political implications. Its individualistic religious concern supports an individualistic approach to economic, social, and political problems. In many ways it was appropriate for the economy of scarcity which prevailed in the Western democracies until the last three or four decades. The virtues of hard work, duty, productivity, and thrift were upheld, and persons were taught to hope for deferred gratifications, in the other world if not in this one. Such individualistic ethics seem less applicable in our economy of abundance and affluent society. We must find an ethical system which redefines the meaning of work, with fewer hours spent in employment, since over production and over abundance are among our chief problems. Also, we need one which deals with some of the severe social inequities which abound in our society and for which individualism, as such, seems to have no answer except that the fittest survive and there should be charity for those who are economically less fortunate.

### III. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Ours is a free society, and as we have previously observed, there are many influences in it, in addition to religion, which tend to shape our minds and determine our philosophy. Notable among these are cultural factors and political influences which tend to make us either conservative, liberal, or extremist in our social philosophy. To be a citizen is virtually tantamount to being a partisan in this country, and even though persons sometimes proclaim their independence by not registering in political parties nor voting in primary elections, nevertheless, most of their political information and education comes

from partisan sources.

Political liberalism. Political liberalism is often characterized by its opponents as being for big government and opposed to individual responsibility. Liberals protest this description by denying that they are anti-individual and by proclaiming that they are for the use of governmental powers only after all others have failed in reaching desired ends. They claim that the chief end of their philosophy is the fulfillment of individuals. When liberals talk about freedom they mean the balancing of interests and rights of individuals in such a manner as to maximize justice for all.<sup>16</sup> Liberalism's characterization of man in a free society could be stated in Reinhold Niebuhr's dictum that man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, while man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

Those who have this liberal philosophy of government come chiefly from three cultural sources: the educated, the working class and the minorities. As a result of these cultural backgrounds being the principle sources of liberalism, the liberal Protestant minister in a middle class suburban community often finds that the tenor of his gospel is at cross purposes with the general political outlook of his parishioners. The chief support for his liberal views will probably come from college graduates who are usually in a minority in most congregations. The organized working class people, who have a liberal

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<sup>16</sup>Lloyd J. Averill, "Political Fundamentalism in Profile", Christian Century, LXXXI, 32 (August 12, 1964), 1011.

political philosophy from a practical standpoint, tend to shun theological liberalism and are more inclined to attend churches with a conservative religious philosophy. Therefore, the liberal minister usually does not receive strong membership support for his liberal views in the pulpit and program of the church. To avoid having his gospel fall on thorny ground and suffer the fate of that spectre, often he has to temper his views and be patient in his instruction and leadership.

Communist extremism. Communism is a social, economic and political philosophy which purposes to change the status quo in the social order by violent revolution and authoritarian control by a party elite. Since it is at least as generally unpopular as Nazism in this country, it has a few followers and adherents among the American people. The Communist Party in America began soon after the revolution had succeeded in Russia and reached a peak in the 1930's during the depression and the 1940's when this country was allied with Russia. It was estimated to have about eighty thousand followers at that time. Party membership, activity, and influence have steadily declined since then, and today it is thought to have about 5000 members, a considerable portion of which are reported to be undercover FBI agents.<sup>17</sup>

A full survey of the Communist Party is not within the scope of this study; however, every church member should be knowledgeable about the party in this country: its history, programs, strength, activities, weaknesses and failures. Since for many years the Communist

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<sup>17</sup>J. Edgar Hoover, Masters of Deceit (New York: Holt, 1958), p. 5.

Party worked underground and subversively, it took the general public some time to become aware of its existence and its possible threat to our free institutions.

Communist method. The most important and useful method of furthering the party's objectives has been the formation of "united front" groups for limited objectives. It is in these groups that communists have sought to make common cause with liberals who seek changes in the status quo for other reasons. The purpose of the fronts is to employ unwitting persons in communist schemes and projects. Sometimes the alleged purpose is altogether worthy from a Christian standpoint.

In this type of cynical manipulation of men which desecrates their worth and dignity for ulterior purposes, front groups have been organized for many purposes. Ralph Lord Roy writes:

These fronts were established to defend, to free, to uphold, to win, to secure, to aid, to battle, to resist, to fight, to struggle. They wanted peace, justice, democracy, the Bill of Rights. They did not want war, injustice, white supremacy, unemployment, higher rents, rising food costs, police brutality, inadequate housing, censorship, militarism, monopolies.<sup>18</sup>

These various fronts involved educators, labor leaders, government officials, business men, leaders of non-profit organizations, women's groups, and clergymen. Their names were given prominent places on impressive letterheads. As soon as these unsuspecting people learned the nature of the groups with which they had become involved, they ceased to participate and summarily withdrew their names, but this

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<sup>18</sup>Ralph Lord Roy, Communism and the Churches (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), p. 191.

was often after the event and too late.

Political conservatism. Political conservatives, who usually constitute the majority in suburban Protestant Churches, believe the least government is the best government. Freedom to them means enterprise, work, business, and the pursuit of life with a bare minimum of interference by laws, regulations, or restrictions. They feel the unrestricted desires and drives of men, as they clash in the market place and elsewhere, constitute equality of opportunity and will tend to regulate themselves. Men should be left to themselves and their self-interests. Therefore, conservatives are usually opposed to civil rights legislation and are for laws which insure a greater measure of free enterprise, such as "Right-to-Work" enactments.

Conservatism in America is supported by two elements: the moderates and the radical right or extremists. Moderates tend to accept some social legislation within limits. They are generally for social security provisions which were enacted during the New Deal of the Roosevelt administration. They are willing to tolerate the labor movement and view the graduated income tax laws as a necessity. They favor civil rights for all citizens and due process of law in dealing with civil disorder. Extreme conservatives or radicals are opposed to: organized labor, income tax, welfare legislation, and membership in the United Nations among other things.<sup>19</sup>

Conservative extremism. Persons of such extreme views are

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<sup>19</sup>Seymour Martin Lipset, "Three Decades of the Radical Right -- 1962", The Radical Right (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 276.

usually members of extremist groups which have their views and ideology defined by authoritarian leaders, as in the case of the John Birch Society where Robert Welch virtually dictates its policies and opinions. They form strong ingroup feelings and tend to distrust opinions which come from any source other than the authority of their group leadership. K. E. Boulding observes:

Where an ideology is exposed to strong counterideologies in its environment, its adherents may resort to the defense of their ideology by withdrawing from the hostile environment into an insulated subculture where the ideology is continually reenforced by mutually supportive communications and where hostile communications from outside are simply cut off.<sup>20</sup>

There were approximately a thousand such organizations of extremists in the United States in 1962.<sup>21</sup> Daniel Bell says the extreme rightists began organizing grass-root organizations in the winter in 1961-62 on a big scale. They had been compelled by political necessity during the Eisenhower years to give support to moderate conservatism. As soon as he was out of power, they polarized in opposition to both moderation and liberalism.<sup>22</sup> We have every reason to believe that there are even more today, since many extreme rightist organizations came into being during the political campaign of 1964 when they thought extreme conservatism had a chance to come to power.

As many analysts have observed, extreme rightists are

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<sup>20</sup>Kenneth E. Boulding, Conflict and Defense (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 284.

<sup>21</sup>Sarah M. Harris, and R. E. Ellsworth, The American Right Wing (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1962), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup>Daniel Bell, "The Disposed - 1962", The Radical Right (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 1.

authoritarian in their philosophy, methods, and proposed solutions.

"Their political reactions express...a profound if largely unconscious hatred of our society and its ways," says Richard Hofstadter, "a hatred which one would hesitate to impute to them if one did not have suggestive clinical evidence."<sup>23</sup> They are inclined to see issues in clear cut categories of good or bad with no middle ground. "Something is either right or it is wrong, is a favorite cry from those on the extreme right".<sup>24</sup> They are tired of "no-win" policies and ask why not total victory over Communism. As Lloyd J. Averill has pointed out, they have a simple answer for every problem: "The way to solve the Cuba problem is to invoke the Monroe Doctrine. We could have stopped the Berlin Wall by the simple expedient of closing the Soviet embassy in Washington....and world Communism will collapse if only American foreign policy will stop helping the Communists."<sup>25</sup>

Sources of extremism. Robert Lee has isolated three social sources of the present wave of extremism in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Each of these sources is traceable to the severe changes which are occurring in our society. First, the revolution which is occurring in the former colonial areas of the world has left Americans with a sense of fear,

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<sup>23</sup>Richard Hofstadter, "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt", The Radical Right, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>24</sup>Brooks R. Walker, "Irresponsibles on Your Right!" The Unitarian Register and The Universalist Leader, CLXI, 6 (June, 1962), p. 6.

<sup>25</sup>Averill, op. cit., p. 1009.

<sup>26</sup>Robert Lee, "Social Sources of the Radical Right", Christian Century, LXXIX, 19, (May 9, 1962)



frustration, and helplessness in a world where there is a constant threat of nuclear destruction. During such periods of stress the authoritarian tendencies in many people demand that the problems of life be solved in no uncertain terms. They are impatient with objective answers and intellectual analyses. They want action from strong leaders.<sup>27</sup>

The second social source to which Lee points is the changing social status of groups of people who are ascending or descending the ladder of social status. Minorities are striving to overcome discriminatory practices and to rise economically, socially, politically, and culturally. Those who have been enjoying the security of the status quo suddenly fear that the drive of the minorities will destroy their system of privilege and power. In such moments of crisis, talk of such abstract matters as civil rights and social justice mean nothing to them. They want a leader and a group that can save their crumbling status.

The third social source of extremism is the loss of personal identity in a mass society. The individual is prone to see himself as insignificant in a culture where virtually everything is done en masse. We have mass public relations, news media, production, education, markets, evangelism and various organizations. Amid all of this, where can a man with a sense of lostness find himself? Often men seek meaning in closely knit ingroups that fight the impersonal forces of collectivism.

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<sup>27</sup>Adorno, op. cit., p. 618.

#### IV. EXTREMIST ATTACKS UPON THE CHURCHES

There are relatively few extreme rightists in the larger Protestant denominations which belong to the National Council of Christian Churches. Rather, they have gathered as "apostles of discord", according to Ralph Lord Roy, in what he and others have variously called a spiritual or Protestant underworld.<sup>28</sup> They have formed organizations which combine religious fundamentalism and extreme political conservatism into a hostile philosophy which only superlatives seem adequate to describe: hyper-pietism, super-patriotism, and ultra-anticommunism. Through their zealous commitment, they are inclined to reverse Paul's two-fold description of the spiritual life. They seem to place heavy emphasis on "...enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, ...dissension, party spirit, ...and the like" and less on "...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, godliness, ...gentleness, (and) self-control; ...".<sup>29</sup>

Though these radicals have worked outside the main church bodies, their diatribes against the mainstream of Protestantism have attracted a small minority of laymen in these churches. These laymen, many of whom would fit Adorno's classification of authoritarian personalities, are impressed with the charges and simple answers which are said to indicate Communist influence. They are stocked with rightist reference books, and that ultimate source of authority, reprints

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<sup>28</sup>Ralph Lord Roy, The Apostles of Discord (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 3.

<sup>29</sup>Galatians 5:19-23.

of testimony before Congressional Committees.

Following the advice of Robert Welch in the John Birch Society's Blue Book, these laymen return to their local churches and denominations to organize groups to fight the church's program from the inside. We will cite only a few of the many organizations which have come into existence in recent years. Each of the following is in a different denomination: the National Committee of Christian Laymen, with headquarters in Phoenix, Arizona; the Methodist Laymen of North Hollywood; and the Congregational Laymen's "Social Action" Study Group of Sierra Madre, California.

Charles S. Poling, a disenchanted Presbyterian minister now with the Phoenix group, has stated the purposes of these groups in the following manner: "We seek to revitalize participation of laymen in the tasks of the church they have for years avoided....They have failed to see changes in the religious field leading to the movement towards Socialism which the 'social gospel' represents....(They) will be stimulated to oppose dictatorial, bureaucratic planning in religions....We implore our laymen friends to shake off apathy and indifference,...(and) awaken to a better understanding of socialist trends in religious circles...."<sup>30</sup> A reading of the materials which these various organizations mail out reveals extensive cross reference, duplication, and borrowing of ideas without mention or credit to original or secondary sources.

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<sup>30</sup>Letter from National Committee of Christian Laymen, (Phoenix, Ariz., May, 1964).

The accusations and charges of the external anti-communist organizations as well as the laymen's groups tend to fall into three categories: First, it is alleged that the leadership of the major denominations is guilty of apostasy. In attacking a play entitled "Round the Cherry Tree" in the November, 1962, issue of Motive magazine, the Methodist Laymen of North Hollywood ask in a letter entitled "Blasphemy at Christmas": "Must we permit Methodist youth literature to ridicule Christian beliefs? Should such infidel plays as this be promoted by Methodist Church leaders?"<sup>31</sup> Poling charges, "The God of Israel and our church fathers has been forsaken and a new God of Social Education and Action has been installed."<sup>32</sup>

The second charge is that the major denominations and the National Council of Christian Churches to which they belong have been subverted by Communism. It has been alleged for some time, and the charge keeps reappearing, that there are 7,000 Protestant clergymen who have been Communist sympathizers, fellow travelers or dupes.<sup>33</sup> In referring to the writings of many Protestant leaders, Edgar C. Bundy says: "This is the spirit of Communism itself - the spirit which tries to destroy established truths, to undermine faith in great religious doctrines, to brainwash people into thinking that

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<sup>31</sup>"Blasphemy at Christmas", Methodist Laymen of North Hollywood, North Hollywood, Calif., December 8, 1962.

<sup>32</sup>Charles S. Poling, "Sowers of Discord", National Committee of Christian Laymen, Phoenix, Arizona, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup>John A. Stormer, None Dare Call It Treason (Florissant, Mo.: Liberty Bell Press, 1964), p. 127.

things that were once called true are no longer true,...".<sup>34</sup> Fred Schwarz diagrams the Communists conspiracy by using concentric circles with a small party at the center surrounded by zones of fellow travelers, sympathizers, liberals and intellectuals including many Protestant ministers, and dupes which include most everyone except the Radical Right.<sup>35</sup> Ralph Lord Roy, in an exhaustive study, has answered these charges, one and all, with thorough research and documented evidence.<sup>36</sup>

The third charge is that the church is carrying on political activities. "This is a dangerous...un-American doctrine", writes the Congregational "Social Action" Study Group, which "...defies the doctrine of the separation of Church and State".<sup>37</sup> Dan Smoot, another extreme rightist says: "The National Council of Churches is a powerful political and legislative lobby for socialism, hiding behind the facade of a Christian name".<sup>38</sup> The John Birch Society sees the National Council as the beginning nucleus of a Communist state church with "the program for the eventual suppression and destruction of the

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<sup>34</sup>Edgar C. Bundy, Collectivism In The Churches (Wheaton, Ill.: Church League of America, 1958), p. 247.

<sup>35</sup>Fred Schwarz, You Can Trust The Communists (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960), p. 59-61.

<sup>36</sup>Ralph Lord Roy, Communism and The Churches (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960)

<sup>37</sup>Laymen's "Social Action" Study Group, Sierra Madre, Calif., Information Letter #17 (September 1964).

<sup>38</sup>Dan Smoot, "National Council of Churches", The Dan Smoot Report, X, 2 (January 13, 1964).

observance of all true religion in the Americas, and the substitution for such observances of a state fraud in the guise of religion,..."<sup>39</sup>

The Churches are, indeed, involved in political matters, but not in the manner nor for the reasons described above. The simple fact is that any minister who publicly prays over war, works for safer highways, or encourages citizenship is engaging in political activity. The ethical principles of Christianity and the morality of issues at stake call the church to responsible, non-partisan action. The fundamentalists cannot seem to understand this and disclaim the fact that they, too, are involved in political matters. The head of the Church League of America, Edgar C. Bundy, is also head of the Abraham Lincoln National Republican Club.<sup>40</sup> The Rev. W. S. McBirnie, a rightist radio preacher from Pasadena, California, made a call for political action in a veiled endorsement of Senator Barry Goldwater for President: "Why are we unwilling to walk the hard road that leads to victory? Why will we not cease equating minor faults of some candidates with major faults of others? Why will we not put first things first?"<sup>41</sup> The Sierra Madre laymen's group accuses their church's official publication of propagating "a particular partisan political

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<sup>39</sup>"The Coming Church Establishment", The John Birch Society, Belmont, Massachusetts.

<sup>40</sup>Editorial in the Chicago Sun Times, October 19, 1959.

<sup>41</sup>Advertisement in Los Angeles Times, October 12, 1964, Part I, p. 16.

philosophy".<sup>42</sup> They do not seem to realize that everything they write on political and social issues is predicated upon conservative political philosophy. It is, therefore, not so much a question of whether the church will be involved in politics but what kind of politics and what program will be supported.

The laymen's protest groups are doing all they can to involve more laymen in their organizations, broaden their power bases, and cause havoc in the churches. One communication sent out by the Phoenix Laymen's Group has a title of "How to Create Quick Interest in National Council of Churches among Uninformed Lay People", and the answer given is to invite a small group of church members to your home and confront them with the "enclosed evidence" of communist activity.<sup>43</sup> The Sierra Madre laymen write: "The vocal and extreme leftists...have run things long enough and it is time to call a halt. We have the power. We only need to exercise it...."<sup>44</sup> They also have their followers introduce resolutions calling for the establishment of conservative policies in the official meetings of the churches. If all else fails, Dan Smoot's advice should be followed: "If all church members who do not agree with policies of the National Council of Churches stopped their giving until their churches with-

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<sup>42</sup>Laymen's "Social Action" Study Group, Sierra Madre, Calif., Information Letter #18 (September 1964)

<sup>43</sup>"How To Create Quick Interest in National Council of Churches Among Uninformed Lay People", National Committee of Christian Laymen, Phoenix, Arizona.

<sup>44</sup>Laymen's "Social Action" Study Group, Information Letter #17, op. cit.

drew from the Council, the National Council would probably die very soon..."<sup>45</sup> Financial boycott has been used in several local churches.

Though the work of these Rightists, in attempting to disrupt the work of the Protestant Churches, has been roundly condemned by many notable persons such as the Assistant Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, William C. Sullivan,<sup>46</sup> and conservative Donald G. Barnhouse, editor-in-chief of Eternity magazine,<sup>47</sup> the extremists keep their program going. They probably will intensify their attack on the churches during the next several years as result of the frustrations of their extremist ambitions in the political area and the part churches had in that failure. However, we must patiently work with them, trying in every way to help them assume the role of a creative rather than destructive minority, at the same time not allowing their activities to obstruct legitimate programs. If all else fails, then democratic sanctions may have to be invoked to compel them to face the consequences of undemocratic behavior.

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<sup>45</sup>Dan Smoot, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>46</sup>Louis Cassels, "The Rightist Crisis In Our Churches", Look, April 24, 1962.

<sup>47</sup>Donald G. Barnhouse, "Communism and The National Council of Churches", Eternity, XI, 9 (September 1960)



## CHAPTER V

### THE DEVELOPMENT AND RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT IN PROFILE

When conflict develops in a local church, those involved are inclined to think that nothing quite like it has ever before occurred. The participants usually see conflict as a unique occurrence. It is understood in this light since the things of which they are most aware are the specific issues, charges, and persons involved. These are most often distinct in church conflicts, but upon close analysis of many conflict situations, it has been found that these specific elements are about the only distinguishing characteristics between conflicts. Otherwise they are strikingly similar, especially in the dynamic course they run.

Conflicts generally do not occur frequently enough in one community, institution, or group for people objectively to become aware of exactly what is occurring and to analyze the various causes, stages, and consequences. They tend to forget the unpleasantness of past experiences as soon as possible. Therefore, conflict usually takes churches by surprise, and people are emotionally embroiled in a social phenomenon which they do not understand and which they seemingly cannot control. They are vaguely aware of the fact that it seems to move from bad to worse, in a sort of vicious reciprocity, but they have few ideas of how to stop it. The defensive methods usually employed tend to intensify it rather than make it subside.

## I. THE DYNAMIC SEQUENCES INVOLVED IN CONFLICT

Social science has performed a service for our culture by helping individuals and groups understand the nature of social conflict. A great deal has been written on this subject, but perhaps the most recent and helpful study is by James A. Coleman and his associates entitled Community Conflict.<sup>1</sup> In it Coleman isolates and describes a certain dynamic pattern which conflict usually follows once it has been initiated. He writes: "The most striking fact about the development and growth of community controversies is the similarity they exhibit despite diverse underlying sources and different kinds of precipitating incidents. Once they have begun they resemble each other remarkably."<sup>2</sup> He describes three dynamic aspects of conflict which he has detected in the study of many instances of conflict: (1) from the initial issue to new and different issues, (2) from disagreement to antagonism, and (3) from balanced community life to psychological and social polarization into sides. We will apply Coleman's dynamic categories in analyzing local church conflict.

The initiation of conflict. Conflict is usually initiated when there are suppressed fears, or hostilities and an issue is raised which touches upon them. Without the background of fear or hostility, it is improbable that an issue will be considered so vital

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<sup>1</sup>James S. Coleman, Community Conflict (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

that a dispute over it will bring conflict. However, Robin M.

Williams says:

Conflict, defined in religious terms, can emerge even if everyone involved is initially devoid of stereotypes, ignorance, standardized modes of scape-goating, or diffuse unfulfilled needs for aggression....If one conceives of "religious values" as those conceptions of the desirable that are "ultimate" for people who are committed to them, then, differences in these final and irrevocable values are by definition not subject to compromises or resolution.<sup>3</sup>

Taking Williams' analysis into consideration, we can broaden the initiating circumstance to an issue which disturbs harbored fears, suppressed hostilities, or ultimate values which people hold.

We have previously discussed the part which suppressed hostilities and disputed values play in conflict. Let us consider the role which fears play in initiating and sustaining conflict. A psychological fear is an attitude, rational or irrational, which a person has when he thinks his personal existence is threatened or when things which he has identified with his selfhood are conceived to be in danger. Psychological fears are identified with feelings of personal insecurity. Therefore, things which tend to threaten a person's status, position, privileges, or powers are treated with apprehension.

Most fears which men hold are irrational and without foundation in fact. They are usually focused against impersonal forces which are conceived to be unscrupulous and diabolical and which manifest themselves through other people and movements. Thus it is that people can

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<sup>3</sup>Robin M. Williams, Jr., "Religion, Value Orientation, and Intergroup Conflict", Readings In Social Psychology (New York: Holt, rev. 1958), p. 648.

have fears that Communist teaching is coming from the pulpit or that integration is about to occur in the pews. The inclusion of a Negro family into a previously all white congregation can sometimes set off violent reactions because of the unwarranted fears that some people have that the presence of Negroes constitutes a threat to their self-hood, their status, and their position.

Radical Rightists try desperately to create a climate of fear among the people whom they are trying to reach. They talk about hidden and ominous forces which are at work. They endeavor to show signs and give evidence of their claims. The degree of success of these programs, which are carried by mass rallies, radio, television, and community cells can be seen in the number of paramilitary groups which have been formed in various parts of the country in recent years. Excited fear, which people naturally have to some degree, of Communism can yield many results. Among them are the following: it can swell the membership of rightist organizations; it can multiply the sale of literature which purports to give the solution to their fears; it can result in larger appropriations in Congress; and it can furnish the background climate for conflict in local churches.

Since people who are frustrated by fears are sensitive to things which would ordinarily leave them unmoved, conflict can be initiated in a church conceivably by a number of things. A sermon which deals with a social issue, a church school lesson which does not give the answers some people are looking for, the action of the official board on a resolution dealing with a social matter, or anything which tends to press or test people's fears can precipitate

conflict. However, the initiating circumstance is usually composed of a series of mistakes, blunders, or misjudgments by the same party. Whereas one or two probes at people's fears may not prove sufficient to provoke them to overt hostility, perhaps a third or fourth such incident will.

In addition to aroused fears and hostilities, a second condition which is necessary for the initiation of conflict is the presence of leadership which is insensitive to these fears and either suppresses or ignores them. In such an event, alarmed people have no recourse but to go outside the normal problem solving channels to express their anxieties and seek answers to them. When people are not free to express their serious and honest doubts in the various committees and boards of the church, then trouble is in prospect for that church. We will consider more fully the necessity of free expression and good communications later.

From specific issues to generalized positions. Once an initial issue has upset the equilibrium of the church community, it is likely to become relatively unimportant. It has served to disrupt relations, but the disruption itself releases pent up hostilities and suppressed issues. Many new and different items become a part of the disagreement. These may or may not be related to the original issues. If a sermon has served as the catalyst of a conflict, then all previous sermons are likely to become subject to the dispute. Other unrelated issues such as the pastor's visiting record, working hours, decorum, etiquette, appearance, his wife's activities, friends, or his children's behavior, scholarship, or irreverence are possible points of

contention which can be added to the dispute.

If the initial issue is a fair housing resolution proposed at an official board meeting, then the propriety of passing resolutions, the actions of the annual conference in the area of social concerns, and the entire social philosophy of the church can become a part of the dispute. Any doubts, fears, misconceptions, or misunderstandings are usually brought out in this expansion of related and unrelated issues. An example of this can be seen in community life where one who is skilled in capitalizing on conflict situations for political purposes tries to know the people's grievances and to be able to articulate them. Most politicians can quickly move from some specific bad situation to charges of maladministration or inefficiency against other office holders.

From impersonal disagreement to personal antagonism. People's ideas and positions are extensions of their personalities, and when their positions are challenged, they feel personally affronted because their egos are connected with their opinions. Therefore, when more and more issues and opinions are brought out in a dispute, the more personally involved people become. This is so true that conflict moves dynamically out of the area of issues and into the realm of personalities.

At this stage of conflict real damage is done in human relations, for personal charges against people begin to be exchanged. They usually start on the level of whispered innuendo, background gossip, and inferred impugnations. But soon personal accusations are brought into the open. Their first introduction into meetings is

likely to be in the form of questions which are loaded with incriminating presuppositions. From such beginnings it is possible for hostilities to become unleashed in slanderous attacks and profane tirades which are vehement and violent. The ultimate level of personal abuse is reached when there are efforts to call down damnations and curses of God upon one another. Few church conflicts ever progress to this level of personal hostility, but they have been known to do so on occasion.

Once conflict has reached this stage of personal animosity, it can perpetuate itself in a sort of reciprocal vindictiveness even though the original issue is settled. The resulting personal injuries to participants in a conflict is one of the most destructive aspects of it. Frequently people become so embittered and so hurt that they seemingly cannot assume normal relationships with their antagonists again. Rather, they refuse to associate or speak, and their hatreds last for years. Under such circumstances, frequently persons involved leave the church and seek new relationships elsewhere, perhaps in another church.

From unity to polarization. While conflict moves dynamically through issues to antagonisms another social process is at work. A trend toward polarization of the church into two opposing fields, camps, or sides begins to develop as more and more people become a party to the conflict. This occurs because people have a psychological tendency to multiply associations which support their beliefs, interests, analyses, and positions and to shun others who disagree with them. We are usually ambivalent in our feelings toward

individuals and groups, liking certain aspects about them and disliking certain other ones. When new disagreements between individuals arise, these tend to increase the dislike and lessen the affection between them. Coleman says:

We associate with every person we know certain beliefs, interests, traits, attributes, etc. So long as we disagree with only one or a few of his beliefs, we are "divided" in our feelings toward him. He is not wholly black or white in our eyes. But when we quarrel, the process of argument itself generates new issues; we disagree with more and more of our opponent's beliefs. Since these beliefs constitute him in our eyes, rather than isolated aspects of him, his image grows blacker.<sup>4</sup>

This psychological polarization of attitudes toward individuals tends to lead to social polarization of the church. Previous relationships which were rather close, can suddenly become distant, and relationships which formerly had very little in common can become intimate in a conflict situation. This realignment originates because the issues at stake are conceived, consciously or unconsciously, to be more important than established relationships. Where there is deep disagreement, relationships must suffer; where there is strong agreement, relationships are intensified.

We have noted in a previous chapter the tendency for groups in the church to be ideologically solidified in their predispositions regarding most controversial questions. When the issues at stake fall within these ideological categories, it is possible for groups in the church to polarize as groups almost immediately. The women's organization can conceivably throw its support and influence in one

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<sup>4</sup>Coleman, op. cit., p. 11.



direction and a couple's club in another. Or the majority in both groups may give their support to one side and a minority in each unite to form a new group on the other side of the issue. Another possibility is for a minority in one group to solidify with a majority in another.

At the outset of any conflict, a church is usually composed of three broad categories of persons which run across group lines.) There is (an active group of supporters who give leadership to the program of the church as it is planned and projected. There is a sizeable majority of members who perhaps attend worship but are relatively inactive so far as participation in other aspects of the program are concerned. They are generally satisfied for others to make the decisions and bear the responsibility for the promotion of the church. There is often a third group composed of people who are dissatisfied with the existing leadership and program. They register a constant negative position toward almost everything that is proposed. In fact, when they are present in a church, they are usually looking for issues which can produce conflict.

If such a minority oppositionist group, as we have just described, does not exist in the church, one of the first things to develop in the polarization process of conflict is such a group. Therefore, as conflict develops, there is an active minority group of program and administration supporters, another minority group of oppositionists, and a majority of the church members in the middle, uncommitted and unaware, at least at the outset, that a dispute is taking place.

But as charges and rumors spread, more and more people become aware of the conflict. As they do become aware, social forces and influences begin to urge them out of neutrality toward one or the other poles. One reason for this is the fact that both protagonists and antagonists are usually actively seeking new persons to support their positions. Another reason is the difficulty which people have in maintaining objective attitudes toward a conflict which is turbulently spreading all about them. Their own psychological nature or economic interest or social philosophy or religious orientation tends to make them side one way or the other for reasons we have already discussed.

The passive majority in the middle ground can be more readily pulled into opposition to the existing program of the church when there is a background of fear. This fear may be the result of many influences on the national scene concerning Communism, integration, threats of war, or other problems. It may be the result of propaganda from the Radical Right which we have previously discussed. Whatever the source of their fears, when their confidence in the existing program has been shaken, they are more susceptible to opposition. They may also join the opposition more easily when they have latent discontents at other points concerning the church program or leadership.

Often during the process of polarization, new leaders appear. This is especially true where a new minority group is formed, perhaps in a meeting in someone's home, to carry on the conflict. The reason for the emergence of new leadership is the fact that existing leaders often have relationships and cross pressures which tend to inhibit

their full commitment to opposition. A new leader has no such psychological restrictions on his complete polarization. It is, therefore, easier for him to become fanatical or even violent in meetings and elsewhere.

Once polarization of the church has been largely accomplished, there is a relentless drive to win the ensuing power struggle for control of the church, its policies, and leadership. In such a contest, the theories and methods of democracy are largely placed aside, and authoritarian tactics are employed instead. This struggle frequently lasts for weeks or months, until one side wins or something intervenes to change the situation or settle the dispute.

## II. THE RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT

As Christians we are distressed by destructive conflict, for it manifests the antithesis of the law of love in operation. If we are true to the precepts of our faith, we are deeply concerned for the well being of other persons: and since unmitigated conflict is psychologically and emotionally injurious to people who are participants in it, we have every desire to seek its early resolution and lessen its effects in people's lives.

We have guilt feelings concerning pernicious conflict in the church for at least two other reasons. For one thing, it denies that the church is the redemptive fellowship that it professes to be as a Christian community. The New Testament has innumerable references to the life of love in the fellowship of the church. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one

for another".<sup>6</sup> Paul appealed to the Roman Christians to "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor".<sup>7</sup> Again he reminds them that "he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law".<sup>8</sup> The writer of the first letter of John penned a passage the contemplation of which in a conflict situation should call us back to the fundamental reason for the church: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love....if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."<sup>9</sup>

Another reason which compels us as Christians to work for the resolution of conflict in the church is the fact that when it is running a destructive course, the church is thwarted in fulfilling its mission. Not only does its teachings sound hollow and meaningless during such a period, but real concern for ultimate values is often replaced with expedient measures. The original goals and objectives of the church are lost, at least for a while, and the institution flounders on a directionless course. All of these concerns call sensitive souls to search for reconciliation and resolution of the difficulties.

Not all conflicts in the church can be creatively resolved. There are many times when relations in social situations have deteriorated to the point where they have to be broken and at least

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<sup>6</sup>John 13:35.    <sup>7</sup>Romans 12:9-10.    <sup>8</sup>Romans 13:8.    <sup>9</sup>John 4:7-12.

one of the parties involved has to make adjustments in a new environment. This is recognized in family relations where divorce sometimes seems to be the only answer. Also, in the emotional turbulence of conflict, we are not always able to apply the principles which we rationally know we should. However, the following procedures and guidelines are set forth in the hope they will prove helpful.

The people in the middle ground in a conflict in the church can often be very helpful in finding a creative solution. Since they have not become involved in personal animosities, they are inclined to be more reasonable, flexible, and concerned for overriding values, rather than the ostensible values involved in the conflict. They can play an important role as third party wherein they can act as a "go-between" to bring the two extreme factions together.

Since the people in the middle are relatively uncommitted in the dispute and are not identified with either position, they can more readily establish communications and uphold the value of compromise, the two indispensable elements in the creative resolution of conflict. Since they are unemotional in the situation, they can appeal to reason, help others calm their emotions and get a new perspective in the situation. The middle group can often see values on both sides in working toward a creative solution. When creative resolution is being sought to conflict, a search for responsible leadership in this middle group should be undertaken.

Anyone who would lead in resolving a church conflict must first seek to get antagonism between persons, as such, reduced.

Acceptance of one another as individuals with imperfections, lack of

good judgment, and even sins is the keystone in depolarizing a hostile social climate. In order to accomplish this, the person endeavoring to lead toward a solution must reflect this attitude in his behavior and actions. He must be able to absorb hostile statements and give a calm unemotional response to them which expresses concern for values which transcend the present situation. If he is able to do this, then he can appeal to others to do likewise. He can point to the superior values of the church: its traditions, its influence in the community, its educational program, its outreach in the lives of people and families, its stability as an institution, and its need for support and loyalty in a time of crisis.

Such appeals to overriding values should be coupled with a candid approach which places blame on all concerned but principally on impersonal forces and circumstances beyond everyone's control. This is not scape-goating since most everyone concerned with a conflict does bear some responsibility for it, and furthermore on close analysis, many background causes and predispositions can be isolated which can rightly be ascribed in part as being responsible. Such a candid analysis will tend to get the conflict off personal issues and antagonisms. This must be accomplished before much headway can be achieved in other aspects of resolution of the dispute. During this phase, special attention should be given to a search for "fields of threat" which individuals have.<sup>10</sup> These defensive areas are where

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<sup>10</sup>Dan W. Dodson, "The Creative Role of Controversy", Social Action, XXIX, 2 (February 1963), 64.

people's egos are unusually vulnerable and sensitive. Recognition of these areas might help explain what otherwise might appear as irrational behavior. If discussion and action can be guided away from these sensitivities, then acceptance of others will be accomplished more readily and progress toward resolution will be much more rapid.

With attention steered away from personal considerations, an effort should be made to establish rational communications between the factions. A third party which acts as a mediator and guide is the best instrument in helping re-establish communication. This person, or group, can come from the passive majority which is somewhat neutral. If necessary, some interested party outside the church can be obtained. On such occasions a district moderator or superintendent can serve a good purpose.

When the parties are brought together to seek a solution, great care should be taken in creating an unemotional atmosphere in which people feel free to discuss their differences without being threatened. This may be difficult to achieve at the outset, but if the leadership is using a creative, Christian approach, it can be brought about in most situations. A great number of personal contacts in advance of these meetings perhaps should be made to insure a democratic spirit in these sessions.

The virtue of compromise should be upheld when efforts toward solution are underway. Neither side is likely to get complete satisfaction in a creative solution since both sides will have to yield points in order to reach agreement. In a situation where ego sensitivities are tied to positions, as they usually are in conflict, if

one side seems to win all the points, the other will feel crushed even though its contentions are untenable. The search should be for alternatives which include some of the values of both sides and which tend to move the conflict out of two polarized, absolute, rigid positions into reasonable middle grounds. The "win-lose trap" or the "total victory fallacy" should be avoided, if possible within the framework of the values involved. However, when ultimate and penultimate values are at stake, we sometimes have to hold firm without compromise. This should be done as charitably as possible.

The issues should be isolated and well defined.<sup>11</sup> The relevant should be carefully separated from the irrelevant. Side issues which are not directly related to the primary issues should be held for consideration at a future time. There should be a search for all the facts related to the issues at stake. If time for research is needed, then persons should be assigned to fact finding projects. Decisions should be held in abeyance until all the relevant facts are before the group.

When the facts are known, possible solutions should be analyzed. Alternatives which are not in the realm of possibility should be put aside, for time spent discussing them can only lead to further frustration. The prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous could well be prayed at this juncture: "Lord, give us the courage to change the things we can, to accept the things we cannot, and the wisdom to know

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<sup>11</sup>H. Harry Giles, "Conflict Episode Analysis - A Tool for Education in Social Technology", Journal of Educational Sociology, XXVI, 9 (May 1953), 425.



the difference."

Out of all the possible solutions, a course of action should be democratically chosen. This course should not be considered final and irrevocable but subject to review after a reasonable time.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, review meetings probably should be scheduled for two reasons. Such meetings will help those who are least pleased with the alternative chosen to feel that their opinions are not ruled out altogether. Also, future meetings can serve as periods of evaluation of the solution and the progress made toward reconciliation and realization of new goals and objectives. When adjustments need to be made in the chosen course of action, they can be made. If a new departure seems to be warranted by events, such is within the limits of possibility.

Often it takes many weeks or months for the effects of conflict to disappear and emotional feelings to subside. Every possible measure should be employed to broaden acceptance and communication as time moves along in order for relationships to normalize. As soon as people who have been on opposite sides can be brought together in new activities and projects which have no relation to the original difficulty, the ends of Christian community will be served and harmony restored to the fellowship of the church.

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<sup>12</sup>Margaret E. Kuhn, "Dealing with Controversy", Social Progress, LI, 6 (April 1961), 15.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

As a mob moved down the street in the French Revolution, a bystander was heard to say, "I must see where they're going, I'm their leader." Similarly, many a desperate pastor or lay leader, watching a rebellious faction spread controversy and frustration in the midst of a church conflict has wished he could ascertain what turn its activities would take next or where it was going. But factions have leaders of their own for "where two or three are gathered together, a leader appears."<sup>1</sup> Conflict involves the repudiation of established leaders and the following of new ones who are at odds with existing programs.

One of the surest defenses against the development of serious conflicts in the church over social issues is the presence of capable and resourceful leadership which has the respect and confidence of the members and the ability to maintain their loyalty. Furthermore, once conflict has occurred, the most indispensable element in its creative resolution is a versatile and flexible leadership which can move to regain the confidence of those who have been confused and frustrated by rumors, lack of information, and at times slander. Such a proposition leads to a discussion of the nature of leadership, and what types are best suited for the local church which is to move

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<sup>1</sup>Bonaro W. Overstreet, "Being Wise In Membership -- Those Who Are Called Leaders", The P T A Magazine, LVIII, 7 (March 1964), 24.

forward in programs of Christian social concern.

Bonaro Overstreet gave a good definition of leadership when she said that it is "A unit of contagious influence....A leader is one person who counts as more than one".<sup>2</sup> The leader's personal outlook and attitude are multiplied in those who follow him. Just what personal qualities make it possible for one person to have such influence over others is not easily discerned. Whatever the qualities, the element of personal influence is the essential ingredient in leadership. It helps guide decisions, establish norms, make policy and execute programs.

#### I. THE TASK OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a kind of work wherein influence is used to meet the needs of social situations. The task of leadership in the church is concerned with meeting needs on three different levels: personal, group, and institutional.

Personal needs. First are the personal needs of individuals in the group. Whatever the objectives of a Christian organization, the first concern of leadership should be the psychological, social and religious needs of the individuals in it. This is another way of saying that the end does not justify the means. "Leadership should be known by the personalities it enriches," says Harvey Seifert,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

"rather than by the followers it captivates and dominates".<sup>3</sup>

When a leader elevates the execution of programs above the fulfillment of persons, he reveals his estimate of men. They have become things to be manipulated. The church leader who thinks that consummating action programs is more important than meeting the needs of individuals in the group has certainly gotten his values askew so far as Christian ethics are concerned. In the past this has been the downfall of much leadership in industry. Some business leaders have seen production schedules, expansion, and return on investment as more important than the well-being of workers. More and more companies, however, are realizing that attention given to worker needs pays manifold dividends in the long run.

Each individual brings to the group certain characteristics which are peculiarly his own. They represent personal drives, desires, aspirations, faith, abilities, defenses, prejudices, suppressed hostilities and frustrations. These elements plus others are manifestations of personality. Their expression, integration and resolution by several individuals in a problem solving situation produce the internal dynamics of a group.<sup>4</sup> The task of leadership is to see that each individual is mentally and emotionally involved and is thus contributing, interacting, and sharing responsibility.

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<sup>3</sup>Harvey Seifert, Church In Community Action (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1952), p. 52.

<sup>4</sup>George M. Beal, et al., Leadership and Dynamic Group Action (Iowa City; Iowa State University Press, 1962), p. 78.

Psychology has long recognized certain basic needs of the human personality. These include the social needs of new experience, activity and variety. More fundamental are the achievement needs of security of status, a sense of personal worth, a sense of creativity, and a felt belonging to the group. In addition to these are the needs for free expression and a sense of personal development and growth.<sup>5</sup> A leader should be aware of these in every person and recognize them in the expressions and efforts of individuals. An idea contributed in a discussion may not have merit in itself, but if the suggestion arises out of a personal need, then it obviously should not be squelched but received and carefully considered along with other suggestions. If a part of the idea can be salvaged and made a part of the solution, it will help the individual sense that he has made a contribution and is of worth.

When an individual makes a statement in a group which obviously arises out of a suppressed hostility, the statement probably should not be challenged and refuted as such. Rather, questions should be asked to help the person express himself and to understand why he feels as he does. In this way the group helps the individual grow by freeing him from pent-up feelings and thereby become a more worthy member of the group. To suppress a person who has made a hostile statement is to make him a prisoner of his own internal frustrations and does not contribute to his self-fulfillment.

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<sup>5</sup>Roger Bellows, Creative Leadership (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1959), p. 54.

At times there are individuals in a group whose ego needs have been so starved that they have a neurotic appetite for satisfaction. These deeper needs usually lead an individual along one of two behavioral patterns. Either the person withdraws into silence and self-protection, not daring to reveal his attitudes, or he becomes over-expressive and domineering and must have a final word on every idea presented. The latter type can become disruptive of group processes. In such a case the leader should perhaps have sessions in private with the individual to help him gain self knowledge through understanding his drives and compulsions. Often such a person can be brought into a more normal relationship with the group through careful attention. In the church we have no alternative but to work creatively with every person who becomes a part of the group; and however deep an individual's needs are, we must help him fill them in one way or another. This is but a measure of Christian love.

Group needs. There are group needs which are usually referred to in social science as group norms. They represent the expectations of the group of individuals in it. They set the limits of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Anyone who is a member is circumscribed by these norms and his behavior must conform to them. Smiles, nods of approval and applause signify acceptance, while frowns, silence, or rebuke mean rejection.

The maintenance of norms is necessary for the continued existence of a group. Without certain behavioral limits and expectations, the group has no distinction nor reason for being. The leader must know the norms of the group well. In fact, he is usually an

embodiment of the expectations of the group and the maintenance of his leadership depends on his ability to reflect group needs. He could be thought of as "Mr. Social Concerns" or "Mr. Merry Mate" since he so perfectly represents the norms of the group. His influence is exerted in applying the demands of the group. If a member becomes unsympathetic or uncooperative with the group, it is the duty of the leader to try to regain his commitment to the group norms, but if he is unsuccessful then the group expects the leader to use his influence in applying sanctions and in imposing penalties on the wayward one. Such are the needs of groups for their own integrity, morale, and purpose. The task of the leader involves sensitivity to these group needs and leadership in their fulfillment.

Institutional needs. Beyond the individual and group needs are the needs of the institution, the church, of which the individual and the group are a part. These needs are usually defined in terms of goals, objectives, and programs. Sometimes they are represented by rules, regulations and requirements. The leader of the group is as much obligated to these interests and aims as he is to the others already mentioned. It is perhaps at this point that the group leader's task is most difficult for it is easy for group members to shirk institutional needs as an authoritarian encroachment upon their freedom and give the cry of "programs handed down from above".

It is imperative that the leader thoroughly understand the origin, formation, and purpose of the various programs of the church and be able to hold them in critical review. The mechanics of church government should be second nature to him. He should be able to

explain how study books are written, programs are conceived and projected, conference resolutions are passed, and the official policy of the church is established. Furthermore, he should be able to help group members understand and accept these programs as being a part of the larger church's obligation to God and society and how to relate themselves to these programs as vital participants. They should be aided in seeing that a Christian social witness is much more effective when it is a part of a unified expression and effort. It is the task of the leader to use his influence in this direction.

## II. LEADERSHIP PATTERNS

Equally as important as the task of leadership are the methods used in the leadership function. Indeed, leadership cannot be divorced from the manner in which one brings his influence or power to bear on other members of the group. The way in which a leader exercises his authority has far reaching implications in terms of success in accomplishing goals, a sense of creativity in the group, morale, and the occurrence and resolution of conflict. Considerable study has been given to the patterns by which various kinds of leaders go about their jobs and the results of these leadership styles in terms of desired effects.

The classical experimental study of leadership styles or patterns and their effects was carried out at the University of Iowa



in 1939-40 by Ronald Lippitt and Ralph K. White.<sup>6</sup> It isolated and experimented with three distinct leadership patterns: authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire. Each of these is based on the degree of control which the leader exercises over decisions and actions of the group. If placed on a continuum, authoritarian leadership with complete control over decision making would be placed at one pole and the laissez-faire style which permits individuals to make all decisions would be situated at the other extreme. Democratic or group control over decision making would be placed in the middle.

Laissez-faire leadership. Laissez-faire is a French word which means to let people do as they please. There are perhaps institutions where laissez-faire leadership is the most appropriate style. The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, California, paradoxically governs itself with a kind of enlightened anarchy. Its president, Dr. Robert M. Hutchins, told John Bainbridge in an interview:

It is my view that the word 'leadership' is offensive to the development of an intellectual community -- that the group moves along by a process of discussion and consensus, and not by a system of compulsion or requirement. We haven't any titles here, or any bureaucracy, and we try to have no administration.<sup>7</sup>

Laissez-faire leadership may work for such a "think-tank" as the center at Santa Barbara, but it does not offer an option for the

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<sup>6</sup>Ronald Lippitt and Ralph K. White, "An Experimental Study of Leadership and Group Life", Readings In Social Psychology (New York: Holt, 1952), p. 342.

<sup>7</sup>"Feel Free: The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions", Congressional Record, 88th Congress (1963)

church which is to give a social witness. We can best illustrate the truth of this proposition by pointing to the results of any church program wherein the leadership has been inertial by default and not by design. The personal ineptitudes of most of us does not permit such freedom but requires some degree of organization if we are to accomplish group and institutional goals.

Authoritarian leadership. Of the three styles of leadership, authoritarian gives the least amount of freedom and responsibility to members of the group. The decision making function resides in the leader. This pattern represents the oldest form of leadership and goes all the way down to the lower forms of life. Bees have their authoritarian "queen", huskies have their autocratic leader, and Dr. A. M. Guhl of Kansas State College has found there is even a hierarchy among hens with rights to food, scratching grounds, roosting places, and "other considerations of value to chickens" being controlled on an authoritarian basis.<sup>8</sup>

From a modern Christian ethical standpoint, authoritarian leadership is the least desirable because it tends to deny the fulfillment of human selfhood. A leader who falls into this pattern violates his own humanity by an exaggerated feeling of superiority and self-importance. He does not have a true estimate of himself and his personal needs. His authoritarian manner, psychologists tell us, has grown out of a deficient up-bringing and consequent immaturity; yet he

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<sup>8</sup>Ronald B. Shuman, The Management of Men (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1948), p. 97.

does not understand this and has a false image of himself.<sup>9</sup>

Authoritarianism is even more severely detrimental to followers. It violates the free expression of individuals by making them subservient. The benefits of a creative life are lost. The sense of dignity which goes with personal responsibility is desecrated. In short, authoritarianism tends to deny the realization of being a free moral agent of which every person has the potential.

Whatever reasons or propaganda an authoritarian leader may use to maintain the motivation of a group, a morale problem soon develops. Regardless of the justifications given for taking away free expression, an underlying rebellion wells up in most people so deprived. This suppressed hostility finds expression in irritability and aggressiveness toward fellow members and the leader himself. Human relations become a problem in the group. If the authoritarian leader cannot find an external "enemy" upon whom to direct the group's hostility, it is likely to disintegrate and his leadership fall.

Church people often accept authoritarian leadership, because they are taught that the morality of a cause is more important than the fulfillment of selfhood and that both values cannot be realized at the same time. So, they come to meetings, go through the motions of democratic behavior and "rubber stamp" the decisions, programs, and projects laid out before them.

Democratic group process. Democratic group process places the

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<sup>9</sup>T. W. Adorns, et al., The Authoritarian Personality (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), p. 240.

decision making function in the group. Democracy means that authority is derived from the will of the people. The word was formed from the Greek root demos, the people, joined with the word kratos, authority. This is to say that all who must abide by decisions, follow rules, and carry out programs should have a part in their creation. Members of the group contribute their ideas, feelings, preferences, and decide between alternative approaches to the solution of problems.

The Iowa studies of leadership styles found that the democratic groups were more efficient in accomplishing group objectives.<sup>10</sup> There was less discontent among the members and less evidence of frustration and aggression. There was much more friendliness, cooperation, and mutual helpfulness. When these qualities prevail among people, they can more readily move forward toward goals.

To answer the criticism that democratic leadership is too time-consuming, Lippitt says that if reaching a decision is the sole objective, then it perhaps can be done more rapidly by manipulative or autocratic means. However, if the objective includes implementing the decision, then total time elapsed between the appearance of a problem and its solution is less in a problem-solving democratic group. This is true even though problem-solving leadership takes longer to reach a decision because implementation of an autocratic decision takes much longer than one which has been arrived at

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<sup>10</sup>Lippitt, op. cit., p. 347.

democratically.<sup>11</sup>

Where democratic methods of management have been applied in industry, the results have been outstanding. Keith Davis says the benefits are: (1) higher rate of output, (2) improved quality of product, (3) fewer grievances and conflicts, (4) reduced turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness, (5) increased income for distribution to those who are involved in the enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

Functional leadership. A fourth pattern of leadership has been formulated in recent years which is built upon democratic principles. It involves spelling out some of the implications of democratic leadership which are sometimes overlooked. It is called functional leadership.<sup>13</sup> because the leadership role is always viewed in terms of necessary functions to be performed within a group in helping that group to grow and work productively. The emphasis is upon participative group membership and the responsibility of leadership is shifted about according to the function to be performed, the situation involved, and the task to be accomplished. It is only in the service of the entire group that certain leadership functions are reserved for the designated leader.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>G. L. Lippitt, "What Do We Know About Leadership", National Education Association Journal, LXIV (December 1955), 556-7.

<sup>12</sup>Keith Davis, "Management by Participation", Management Review, XLVI (February 1957), 71-2.

<sup>13</sup>Lippitt, "What Do We Know...", p. 557.

<sup>14</sup>Thayer A. Greene, "Group Dynamics: A Tool for the Church", Christianity and Crisis, XXII (November 26, 1962)

The leadership roles which group members play involve group-centered, task-centered, or self-centered functions. Some of the group building functions include: encourager, feeling-expresser, harmonizer, compromiser, standard-setter, consensus-taker, and follower. Work-doing functions might include: information-seeker, initiator, opinion-seeker, clarifier, elaborator, and summarizer. The designated leader has the responsibility of sensing functional needs and seeing that they are fulfilled.<sup>15</sup>

### III. DEMOCRACY IN THE CHURCH

None of the leadership patterns we have discussed ever appears in absolute form. At times there are elements of each in any dominant pattern. However, it would seem that democratic group process is the method of organization which is most needed in the field of Christian social concerns in the church. Within this framework, the group can consider the functions to be performed and shift leadership roles and patterns accordingly. This approach may be especially essential in Christian social concerns, since the modern lay person, like the average citizen, is particularly resentful of authoritarianism in an area which has to do with his religious, social, economic, and political freedom. While he may respect the right of hierarchical leaders to study issues and make pronouncements, he wants to do some study, evaluating, reflecting, and thinking of his own.

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<sup>15</sup>Lippitt, "What Do We Know...", p. 557.

When democracy is brought into the groups of the church there is far less tension and conflict. Authoritarianism involves a suppression of people's doubts, questions, fears, and inquiring concern. When this is done, underlying hostility builds up which finds expression in aggressive behavior toward the church's program and its leaders. If, however, people are allowed free expression, if they can raise severe questions, and seek honest answers, there will be no resulting ill-will. Furthermore, if they are given the information upon which to make their decisions, they will in the long run reach conclusions which reflect a high sense of Christian ethics and which generally agree with the official position of the denomination. Even if their decisions are occasionally less correct than professional opinion, the values in terms of self fulfillment of lay people thinking through ethical and social issues for themselves far outweigh any differences in value judgment which may result from their free expression. There is also the great advantage of having the church membership actually standing behind church pronouncements.

When democracy is the method of group control used in the church, there is also more efficiency than in an authoritarian or a laissez-faire situation. Some people often confuse democracy in a group with a laissez-faire state where authority is shunned, discipline is ignored, and disunity abounds. This is a mistake, for there should be authority, discipline, and unity in democratic groups, resting ultimately upon the responsible majority but administered by the democratic group leader, in behalf of the group. If democratic groups are properly led with active leaders who understand democratic

processes and who are not hesitant to administer the desires and disciplines of the group in regard to reaching its goals and objectives, then a democratic group has more unity and forward thrust than an authoritarian group. White and Lippitt say that a democratic group must enforce cooperation of a sort in order to be democratic:

Compulsion is not, as we see it, inherently undemocratic -- provided it is on behalf of majority decisions, or in support of the basic values of the community, and provided it does not invade the realm of thought or speech. The alternative may be anarchy.<sup>16</sup>

Democratic group control circumscribes some of the behavior of members, but not their thoughts and speech which remains relatively free. Free expression cannot be absolute, however, for some compulsive talker could keep a group in session all night and still not get anything done. Therefore, guidance has to be given by the leader at the beginning of a session in helping the group decide what points it wants to consider, and in forming an agenda from these points. In order to help the group be efficient in its deliberations, the leader should summarize, from time to time, what progress has been made in covering the points and reaching their goals. He should also ask the silent members what they think of matters before the group and keep the discussion from being dominated by a few.

Democratic church leaders. Most of the leaders in the church are what Gorman calls "status" leaders.<sup>17</sup> That is to say, they are

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<sup>16</sup>Ralph White, and Ronald Lippitt, Autocracy and Democracy (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 295-6.

<sup>17</sup>A. H. Gorman, The Leader In The Group (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 23.



chairmen of boards, commissions, or committees because the larger organization has constituted the groups or committee and has elected them to their positions. In a few cases they are appointed by an institutional authority. Their position is conferred upon them. In some instances the committee is allowed to elect its own chairman, i.e., it is autonomous.

In order to be democratic, a status leader must win the confidence of the members of the group. He must help them to think of him, not in terms of his status as chairman, but rather as one who is eager to share the leadership function with them. The group members must feel free to evaluate his ideas on their merits without considering their origin, and also, to promote and defend their own. Dialogue and discussion must be free and easy.

The selection of leaders. Great care should be given in the selection of leaders in the church. No more important stewardship can be exercised than that of a conscientious nominating committee. Primary attention should be given to trying to ascertain whether prospective nominees for leadership positions are basically democratic, laissez-faire, or authoritarian in their approach to people and organizational responsibility. The type of leaders chosen usually determines the pattern of control exercised in the group.

In so far as possible the elevation of authoritarian persons to positions of leadership in the church should be avoided. Authoritarian personalities present difficulty for any democratically functioning group, for their ideas and modus operandi are not equalitarian but antidemocratic. If they do gain office, great care should be

given in holding them in check through democratic procedures. When possible, such persons should be led into counseling programs where they can gain insight into their personality make-up. Once authoritarian persons have a thorough understanding of their drives, impulses, and aggressions, they can modify their antidemocratic behavior and become more constructive members and workers.

Persons who have democratic attitudes come closer to filling Christian ethical standards. Their lives reflect a deep respect for the well-being of fellow humans. They consider the fulfillment of others along with their own. They are humble in the estimate of their abilities and see possibilities for good in people all about them. They are open-minded and teachable. They are flexible in social situations and are open to the development of new friends. They can love others because they do not hate themselves. They have few suppressed hostilities, but more fully accept themselves and others.

Persons with democratic inclinations tend to enjoy differences between people and the values they hold. They are not judgmental toward others but accept them and their opinions without insisting on conformity to rigid standards. They want to help each individual realize his own worth and can usually find some way in which to relate his basic needs to the goals and objectives of the group. Their positive attitude toward the worth of each person is inspiring to others in the group. Their faith finds expression in terms of ultimate concern for ultimate values.

Most local churches are blessed with many such persons who are available for leadership. Often several are in positions of responsibility. The aim should be to increase their tribe. Usually there are more democratically inclined potential leaders in the background waiting to be discovered than have been called upon to take responsibility. A nominating committee should be resourceful in finding and engaging persons who can creatively relate themselves to others, and to the goals of the church as leaders.

The training of democratic leaders. The biggest obstacle in getting uncommitted people involved in positions of responsibility is the fact that leadership is generally new for them. They may have a drive toward acceptance of the job out of their psychological need for new experience, but they are thwarted by the foreboding fears of an unknown status and the insecurity which goes with inexperience. They need confidence and reassurance.

While encouraging words from others may be helpful, persons need training in democratic group process and leadership principles in order to overcome their sense of inadequacy. Indeed, their fears may be altogether justified, and what is needed are not urgings to take the job but provisions for help in learning social skills and developing democratic methods of procedure.

Training is the transfer of the accumulated experience of others to novices in the field. There are several ways in which this can be done. Leadership training conferences constitute one method. These are very worth while. Many times they are the first introduction of leadership principles to some people. Through these sessions

persons can be impressed with general ideas and broad outlines of democratic action. Such background knowledge is essential. Use can be made of materials on democratic leadership now widely developed by management, educational, and social welfare groups.

In-service training is perhaps the place where most leaders learn to apply the principles of democracy. Abstract ideas are not quite real to persons until they learn to apply them in working situations and then critically evaluate their own progress. In the local church the pastor or lay leader would most likely be responsible for such leadership training. It is never attempted in actual committee or board meetings because it would undermine the group's confidence in their leader and make him insecure. This type of training should be done in private sessions and scheduled only after a leader has expressed a desire for help.

The pastor as a leader. The nature of the pastor's position makes him the most influential person in the church, except in those few instances where his leadership has been rejected and he is on the way out. The denomination places a mantle of authority upon the pastor by ordination. This is what social scientists call formal authority. The degree of formal authority a pastor has conferred upon him depends on the form of church government of any particular denomination. There are essentially three types of government: congregational, episcopal, and "modified" episcopal.

In the congregational system the pastor has the least formal authority. All policy decisions and most matters related to the ecclesiastical office, and the profession of the ministry, including

the powers of ordination, are under lay control. In the strict episcopal form virtually all power and decision making authority are in the hands of the clergy. In a modified system, such as that in The Methodist Church, there is shared responsibility. The ministry controls the profession, but otherwise almost all policies, programs, and decisions are reached through a partially representative democracy with at least equal representation of the laity on every conference level, and in some cases the lay officials outnumber the clergy as in the local church governing body.

Whether through appointment by ecclesiastical superiors or by elevation of a congregation, a pastor is given a responsible position. What he makes of that position largely depends on the confidence of the members in his leadership role. Whatever degree of formal authority a pastor has, it counts for little, if he does not obtain "informal" authority as well. This latter is not conferred but is won through personal capacity and leadership ability.

The authoritarian pastor. Through his preaching, social contacts, and pastoral ministry, the pastor is in a favored position to win the confidence, love, and respect of the members of the congregation. Indeed, the prestige which he usually gains often makes it possible for him to wield uncontested power over the congregation's decisions and programs, regardless of his formal authority. The temptation to become a benevolent autocrat is ever before the popular pastor. As Harvey Seifert has reminded us:

The high-powered preacher may think he has no time to understand another's viewpoint or to discuss the issues. He issues orders between appointments, or he dominates people by the

pressure of his prestige. He may rationalize this on the theory that he is an expert. He is, nevertheless, buying short-term gains at the price of long-term losses.<sup>18</sup>

An influential pastor may find it easy to become dogmatic. People are always looking up to him and listening. He can assume the role of unquestioned authority on matters of social ethics, theology, worship, or any other matter related to Christian faith and the church. A crusading moral absolutist preempts the field of responsible and creative thought on the part of the congregation. Not only his sermons, but his conversation can sound a note of dogmatic finality after which word spreads through the congregation that "the pastor has said so".

The dogmatic pastor can lay out programs by acting as a committee of one. He can formulate the guiding principles, work out the details, assign all the duties, and take the credit for any success (but never failure). On the other hand, he can announce his opinion on a matter before it reaches a responsible committee for decision. The group then has no alternative but to endorse the pastor's opinion by a vote of confidence to avoid an affront to his prestige. A leading corporation made a boast of its democratic management. Every person on the executive committee including the president, had only one vote. A visiting investigator found, however, that the president announced his position clearly in advance of

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<sup>18</sup>Harvey Seifert, "The Uses and Abuses of Ministerial Leadership", Pulpit Digest, LXIV (September 1963), 25.

the board meetings so the votes were meaningless.<sup>19</sup>

The popular pastor, other considerations aside, would have no difficulty in becoming a manipulator of people. He can short-circuit democratic procedures by lining up members on particular issues in advance of board or committee meetings. When things unfold, they have the appearance of democratic origin. Such stage setting domination makes a mockery of group responsibility and reduces group members to the role of stooges. However important the outcome of an issue may be deemed, it is hard to envisage a situation which would justify such cavalier disregard for the basic tenets of democratic control. Every pastor, even in the most desperate hours, should pray to be delivered of such temptations. We should bear in mind what Seifert has said:

Under God, others are on the same level with ourselves. We act toward them out of humility instead of pride. No man is an object to be manipulated. He is rather a neighbor to be met with love and brotherly concern. Love shows itself partly as the ability to listen and to grant the intrinsic claims of others.<sup>20</sup>

However popular a pastor may be, a congregation will condone authoritarian practices only so long. Every violation of their humanity will be registered in their sub-conscious lives. Little by little an underlying resistance and tension will build up, until one day, in a crisis situation, their frustration will break forth in

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<sup>19</sup>Robert N. McMurry, "The Case for Benevolent Autocracy", Harvard Business Review, XXXVI (January-February 1958), 84.

<sup>20</sup>Seifert, "The Uses....," p. 25.

aggressive hostility toward him. If he is a typical authoritarian person, he will wonder how this has come about and will conclude that his tormentors are just basically evil people. In such a situation lay leadership becomes weaker and church programs less effective than they might be.

The pastor as democratic administrator. The pastor should understand his role as that of chief administrative officer in the local church. In this capacity, he should administer the policies, programs, and decisions which the local church has democratically formulated. He also has a duty to administer in the local church the program and policies of the denomination of which he is a part. This should be done as democratically as possible. While the pastor should make sure that the program he is administering has been arrived at democratically, he should feel free to carry it out with vigor and determination and without feeling that he must have official approval of every little turn. As Seifert has said: "The administrator with full integrity should observe the limits set by the group. Within those bounds, however, it is the expression of democratic intention to administer details with energy, initiative, and strength."<sup>21</sup>

If democratic procedures are to prevail in the church, the pastor must give more than flattering unction to their establishment and maintenance. He must practice democracy in his own position. A pastor who is equalitarian shares power, knowledge, responsibility,

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 26.



and mutual respect for others in the congregation. He is democratic when he uses approaches and methods which release the creative energies in the lives of others. Rather than debating in his mind as to whether he can make a given decision, he is asking if it is possible to find a group to make it. He purposely avoids the concentration of authority in his person and makes every effort to diffuse responsibility throughout the church. He is open-minded and not so sure of the correctness of his opinions. He is approachable on any subject and strives to be fair-minded in his judgments.

The democratic pastor is especially careful in his dealing with leaders of the various groups in the church. In the running consultation that goes on between himself and them over ever present organizational problems, he respects them as equals. He listens to their analysis of problems and offers suggestions only when he feels they are wanted. If he ever makes inquiries, it is always in inclusive terms: "What is our schedule?" "How are we coming?" "What are our problems?". Such questions elevate the leaders above the pastor since he assumes the leaders have a superior knowledge and grasp of situations.

Such an equalitarian attitude on the part of the pastor makes communication easy. It allays anxiety and provides a smooth path for human inter-action. The pastor's ideas and suggestions are more readily accepted when people feel free to disagree and advance their own. His influence is deeper and is more lasting. It can bring changes without up-setting relationships because through it people are not being forced nor manipulated but have a responsible part in

the reorientation of their programs.

Church leadership in a conflict situation. Michels observed in 1915 that "Every autonomous movement of the masses signifies a profound discordance with the will of the leaders."<sup>22</sup> Conflicts in the church arise out of differences in religious philosophy, out of lack of information, or through faulty communication which results in misunderstanding. The first duty of the leadership of the church when conflict occurs is to try to maintain their emotional equilibrium. Fast changing circumstances have a tendency to throw persons into fear and anxiety because of the insecurity involved in fluctuating allegiances. Fear and emotion interfere with clear and sound thinking and increasingly cause a leader to aggravate conflict rather than be a part of its solution.

Under emotion a leader might be tempted to use authoritarian methods to suppress trouble makers and restore a type of order to the fellowship. Such methods might bring a superficial tranquility by either driving rebellious people from the church or by temporarily silencing their objections, but they offer no permanent solution, except in instances in which the minister is administering the democratic decisions of the group. Authoritarian approaches for the most part only protract conflict and in many ways make it more durable and severe, for reasons we have already discussed.

After gaining control of himself, a leader in a conflict

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<sup>22</sup>Robert Michels, Political Parties: (New York: Hearst's International Library Co., 1915), p. 173.

situation should try to ascertain what immediate issue precipitated the crisis and what the more fundamental issues are. | Often the primary reasons for a crisis have been suppressed. The immediate issue may or may not be related to the underlying causes. An illustration would be the case where the minister of a church had been dogmatically preaching on racial issues for months without the people having an opportunity to take part in study and dialogue. On the suggestion of the minister, the chairman of the Christian Social Concerns Commission presented a resolution to the Official Board to support an open housing policy with regard to race in the community. A controversy developed in the meeting and the matter was tabled. During the following week conflict spread through the church. The immediate cause of the conflict was the presentation of the resolution; the primary underlying cause was the use of an authoritarian method of education on racial matters with the mounting frustration it brought in the minds of the members.

After causes have been ascertained, the leader should begin the task of establishing, or reestablishing communication between all parties concerned in the ways suggested in the preceding chapter. Real communication occurs when persons face a problem or an experience together, and there is a dialogue between the members. It occurs when members make a genuine effort to listen and to understand each other's ideas or interpretations of a problem. In order to get people who are parties to conflict to the place where they can communicate, the leader may have to point to values which go beyond

the immediate difficulty, i.e., the necessity of free discussion, the unity of the church, etc.

As soon as communication has been established and the people have gained some knowledge of the primary causes as well as the immediate cause, an appeal for a reasonable solution should be directed toward the middle-of-the-roaders. The majority in any conflict are the moderates who avoid extreme positions. They are confused by conflict and can be drawn into extreme positions if their fears are excited and if they do not have sound information. The moderates usually normalize if communication is successful and are ready to lead in a compromise solution.

A democratic leader in a conflict situation is looking for a compromise answer to the dilemma which the members face. In the hypothetical illustration mentioned above, a reasonable solution would not be on the one extreme dropping the issue altogether or on the other pole to call the board back in session and pass a resolution on open housing. A fair alternative would probably be the establishment of an educational program on housing patterns and problems where democratic methods were used.

The introduction and maintenance of democratic group process will prevent the development of many conflicts in the church. Where they do occur democratic procedures will make them short-lived and less disrupting. Ordway Tead has written:

Human beings...fulfill themselves, are most happy, and most productive, as they have the free opportunity for affectionate and responsible cooperative relationships with their fellow

beings.<sup>23</sup>

This observation was made of industrial workers in the decade ahead.

It is equally true of the member of the local church.

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<sup>23</sup>Ordway Tead, "Business Leadership in the Decade Ahead",  
Advanced Management, XX (February 1955), 6.

## CHAPTER VII

### IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL CHURCH PROGRAM

Out of the study of conflict, its causes and creative resolution, certain principles emerge which are important for the local church program. They seem simple and could be considered as something of a restatement of long established values of the Christian community. However, they are profoundly based in theology and the behaviorial sciences, and they have far reaching implications for human relations and social organization. If these principles are taken seriously during crisis situations as well as in the planning and execution of the church program, they will do much to insure that the conflicts which are encountered will be constructive rather than devastating to individuals and the church.

#### I. INSIGHTS FOR CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Not all conflict in the church should be avoided. Indeed, it should be anticipated, especially when a confrontation of issues is foreseen. If the church is to remain relevant to the age, it must not seek to avoid issues which promise to be controversial, for many matters which are crucial for the realization of social justice are controversial. Therefore, on occasion the church must plan and execute programs which are liable to be the vortex of conflict if it is to remain true to its mission.

Confronting the issues. A planned confrontation of social issues in the church should be carefully thought out. First,

searching questions concerning the necessity of the projected confrontation of issues should be explored by the leaders and groups involved. Not all moral issues are of equal concern. The granting of a beer license to a cafe can hardly be equated with the dangers of nuclear war, nor can the possible physical effects of smoking tobacco be justly considered as injurious to human personality as the near certain mental and spiritual degradation which result from racial discrimination and segregation. The issue under consideration should be examined in the light of the church's duty to God and society, as well as to the people in the church. Relatively inconsequential issues should not be pressed to the point of confrontation. There are too many issues of importance for the church's time and energy to be spent with matters of little concern.

When an issue is deemed worthy of confrontation in the church, then, after careful preparation, it should be openly and honestly faced. Preparation should be as thorough as possible. Teams or groups of people should be formed who will do research and become well informed on the facts, issues, and opinions involved. They should cultivate an attitude of rational analysis. These experts should carry the burden of leadership in attempting to inform the remainder of the church members of the issues and ethics involved in any given social problem.

The church's involvement in social action should not be secretive or concealed from the entire membership. If the issues are worthy of confrontation, they are worthy of being confronted openly. Efforts to conceal or to carry on operations in the back-

ground tend to create suspicion and doubt. Experiments in social science have shown that people have a more positive attitude toward both proposed social actions and the leadership involved if things are carried out with openness.<sup>1</sup>

More important in planning a confrontation of issues in the church than being informed and open, as important as these are, is the religious preparations of the persons involved. The law of love should be operative in their minds and hearts. Nothing should be done in a hostile or vindictive manner. Rather, a reservoir of good will and understanding should be generated. Adverse responses can thence be anticipated and be met with love, and goodwill, as well as with information and honesty. Such a method and spirit can do much to keep a confrontation of vital social issues from developing into destructive conflict in the church.

Such a creative approach in a confrontation also helps avoid what Elise Boulding refers to as conflict traps:

Every group which has been together for any length of time has certain "conflict traps", or patterned ways, into which all new problems tend to fall. These conflict traps are in fact old, unresolved, and long-hidden problems and issues which unconsciously arise whenever new issues are introduced.<sup>2</sup>

We can add to Boulding's concept of conflict traps, old methods and approaches to conflict resolution which are authoritarian, absolutist,

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<sup>1</sup>Murray Horwitz, "Managing Hostility", in Robert L. Kahn and Elise Boulding (eds.) Power and Conflict in Organizations. (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>Elise Boulding, "Further Reflections on Conflict Management", in Kahn, op. cit., p. 146.



or otherwise undemocratic and uncreative. Some churches need to be saved from the trap of their usual approaches to problem-solving rather than old, unresolved issues. We believe the approach outlined above, along with the establishment of democratic methods in the church, which we will discuss later, will help greatly in avoiding conflict traps.

Controlling hostility. In spite of our best efforts, sometimes hostilities are aroused in a confrontation of issues and the dynamics of conflict become operative in the church membership. Frequently, a confrontation will bring out role conflicts between what members and leaders conceive to be the role of the church in social action. This is a result of lack of communication and lack of education, which we will discuss more fully in a later section. But when people think the church has no business concerning itself with social justice, or the minister has no right to speak his conscience on social problems, then obviously there must be an understanding of this subject before too much can be done in keeping such people in a creative relationship to the church. The theology, ethics, and stated policies behind the church's involvement in social action should carefully and reasonably be explained to these people.

Indications that a conflict might be in the making can be observed in tendencies of people to polarize into sides. This is, doubtless, the most crucial developmental stage in the dynamic sequences which occur in conflict. When tendencies toward polarization are observed, efforts to counter this development should be undertaken as soon as circumstances permit.

Keeping lines of communication between opponents open, keeping the discussion on the issues involved, and keeping personal animosities and emotions at a minimum are the indispensable elements in preventing polarization of the church when hostilities have flared in a confrontation of social issues. When people begin to pull aside, to group together in homes, or otherwise show indications of taking an unwholesome attitude and an uncreative approach to a developing conflict, personal contacts should be made to retrieve these people from exclusion and to keep them in a creative relationship with the church even though they maintain their minority position. They should be made to know that their opinions are important and will be given due consideration in the democratic deliberations of the issues being considered by the church. Only in such an approach is there room for opponents to grow in their social philosophy and to be redeemed from less than Christian attitudes.

Dealing with problem personalities. Expansive-aggressive neurotic personalities, or authoritarian personalities, one or both of which are usually involved in church conflicts, make creative resolution of conflict more difficult to achieve. Their involvement calls for an extra measure of the graces and endowments which we have previously described as being necessary for the operation of creative procedures in conflict situations. The difficulties which problem personalities present might tempt us at times to despair and to seek to isolate them from the fellowship of the church.

But the church is made up of all kinds of people; the intelligent and the relatively ignorant, the wealthy and the less

fortunate, the educated and those of meager accomplishment, the mature and the immature. Morally speaking all these people are on an equal footing and all have an equal claim on the ministries of the church. If there is any difference in the church's obligations to people, it surely must be in favor of the less fortunate, the immature, and the neurotic.

Regarding the church's obligation in dealing with expansive-aggressive neurotic personalities, C. W. Morris has reminded us that:

Church membership as such does not change a neurotic person. Neurotic drives may remain the same whether a person is inside the sanctuary or outside. Our basic ways of dealing with problems remain relatively consistent in every situation.....The basic challenge to the minister and the flock of God is to deal lovingly with the real self of the neurotic who fears himself.<sup>3</sup>

The expansive-aggressive tries to achieve respect, admiration, and acceptance through the imposition of his ways, standards, and attitudes. He continually bids for sympathy, understanding, and opportunity, and yet he is often irritable, resentful and compulsive in human relations. Is it not our Christian duty to look beyond this barrage of neurotic activities to find the real person and to see his deep needs? Should we not form a friendship with his true being and do all we can to help him come to self-fulfillment? Should we not seek to reenforce his acceptance of himself, not on the basis of his abilities or accomplishments, but on the basis of his natural rights as a person?

This is not an easy thing to do, because of our own neurotic

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<sup>3</sup>C. W. Morris, "The Terror of Good Works", Pastoral Psychology, VIII, 76 (September 1957), 25-32.

tendencies we become irritated with their wall of neurotic mechanisms and defenses. As Morris says, "It is always easy to criticize, but much harder to struggle with one's own feelings of frustration and antipathy toward another who is 'deliberately' acting in an unreasonable way. It is even harder to go behind the scenes of unreasonableness and scan its motives."<sup>4</sup>

When a neurotic person is helped to accept himself and be at peace within, much is done to take the dross out of his relations with other people. When he has a new attitude toward himself, he will probably cease his compulsive activities, and he will be in a position to learn new behavioral adjustments and more socially acceptable ways of fulfilling his psychological needs. A church fellowship should be a place where emotionally inadequate people are helped to come into their own and to realize the best there is in their personalities. The creation of such an environment in the church should be one of the goals of teaching and training.

A counseling program in the church can accomplish much in helping neurotic people come into a fuller life. Counseling which is done properly can help people face and understand their problems. It can help them work through their negative feelings to a positive acceptance of themselves and others. It can help them explore alternative ways of approaching problems and making adjustments. It can help people separate the changeable from the unchangeable aspects of their problems and deal in the realm of possibilities. It can, also,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

help open channels of communication between neurotic people and others.

Authoritarian personalities can be helped by similar procedures. Though their problem is not one of emotional disturbance -- in fact, they are usually not aware that they have a problem -- it is nevertheless rooted in a negative attitude toward their inner beings. As in the case of the neurotic, we should strive to make the church a sanctuary of love and self-discovery where such people are helped to make a continuing reappraisal of their person in an environment of acceptance.

Authoritarian persons can often come to a new understanding of their personalities, their drives and compulsions, in group therapy conducted by persons skilled in this field. Many churches are now establishing these as spiritual enrichment groups, prayer groups, and self-discovery groups. In these, authoritarian personalities often receive unbiased, uninhibited reflections on their personalities and how they affect others. Some are wise and intelligent enough to alter their behavior accordingly.

Since authoritarianism in people is a matter of personality development, principally in the home environment, much of the church's efforts should be directed at prevention of the development of authoritarian personalities. This can be done primarily by helping people establish and maintain the kind of homes which produce wholesome, equalitarian people. James G. Ranck did research among 800 theology students to determine whether there is a relation between authoritarian personality tendencies and religious conservatism. One of Ranck's conclusions was that "the more authoritarian attitudes of religious

conservatives and the more democratic attitudes of religious liberals, were primarily the consequence of family attitudes experienced in early life."<sup>5</sup> This study further substantiates the same general conclusions of many others.

The findings of such studies should cause a greater emphasis in the program of the church on the importance of the Christian home. Often the elevation in the life of the church of the virtues of a Christian home is reserved for the observance of a special week on Christian Family Life in the spring or to Mother's Day. Such an observance is important; yet, much more needs to be done in teaching the meaning of love and acceptance as the proper expression of the Christian faith in the family circle. Christian Family Life Committees should be actively seeking ways to help educate families on the attitudes which are conducive to the development of mature, equalitarian personalities which have a healthy attitude toward themselves and others. No more fundamental Christian work can be done than this.

Dealing with outside reference groups. As long as we live in a free society and the church is not a closed community, church members will be influenced to some degree by outside groups, ideologies, social pressures, and cultural mores. Such influences will doubtless affect the quality of many churchmen's religious faith and commitment. This is not a new problem, but one which the church in years past has

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<sup>5</sup>James G. Ranck, "Religious Conservatism - Liberalism and Mental Health", in Wayne Oates (ed.) The Minister's Own Mental Health, (Great Neck, N. Y.: Channel Press, 1955), p. 74.

tried to cope with in many ways: authoritarian control, withdrawal from society, and the creation of institutional safeguards. During the Protestant era, efforts have been directed toward helping members find a faith so reasonable, sound, and durable that they can live in a free society with outside influences and pressures having only a minimum effect upon them.

Such an approach, if done well, is quite adequate for the customary social encounters of church people in the world at large, and it upholds our belief in a free society. However, for the last decade, the Protestant churches in America have been assaulted with a type of philosophical proselytizing by a combine of religious, social and political extremist groups which calls for counter measures beyond the scope of routine Christian education. Defensive and offensive procedures are needed to deal with the attempts of these would be outside reference groups to invade Protestant congregations.

In line of defense, churches should study the methods of these extremist groups. What are their ethics and theology? Who is behind them and why? How do economic and political interests play a part in the extremist organizations? What are their purposes and aims? From whence came their leaders and what is their training? Is their literature scholarly, academic, and truthful or does it contain innuendo, unfounded and unsubstantiated allegations and accusations? Several reliable studies have been made to expose the philosophy, methods, and tactics of extremist groups. They are available in most public libraries.

When an assault is made on a local church or its pastor, it may be necessary to answer the charges in published replies which can be distributed freely in the church and community. Some extremist charges are so cleverly drawn that they have to be refuted as soon as possible in order to prevent confusion and fear among members of the church.

Denominational headquarters generally have materials on the irresponsible charges of extremists available for local church study. The Board of Lay Activities of The Methodist Church recently published a booklet by William C. Sullivan, Assistant Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, entitled American Heritage, Methodism, Communism, and the Future.<sup>6</sup> These materials explain the mission of the church in the modern world and defend it from the charges of extremists.

The church not only needs to inform itself concerning the calibre of its adversaries, but offensively to urge other community institutions to do the same. Community newspapers, radio, and television can do much in helping the public probe into the nature of extremist organizations and come to some understanding of the undemocratic character of their activities. Often service clubs are interested in hearing the church's analysis of extremist activities. Such programs are more effective when they are given by well informed laymen who have become expert on the mission of the church in the modern world.

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<sup>6</sup>William C. Sullivan, "American Heritage, Methodism, Communism, and the Future" (General Board of Lay Activities, Evanston, Ill., 1964)



## II. THE NEED FOR DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES IN THE CHURCH

One of the most important considerations to be kept in mind in the work of the local church is the application of democracy in the planning and execution of the church program. Democracy is a method of dealing with conflicting issues creatively and constructively as they arise. H. H. Wilson says:

Out of the conflicts and controversies of America's early years, there evolved a concept of social and political procedure which emphasized discussion and compromise in an atmosphere of freedom. Democracy is pragmatic, scientific, and experimental; it recognizes that words must not be mistaken for things and that there are no final answers which are right for all times and all conditions. Adequate understanding of democracy as a procedure, as an attitude, a way of life, a technique for resolving controversy, enables its practioners to use many techniques without fear.<sup>7</sup>

George B. de Huszar comes even more to the point at which democracy is meaningful in the local church. Says he: "Democracy is something you do; not something you talk about. It is more than a form of government, or an attitude or opinion. It is participation".<sup>8</sup>

Democracy in the church means that the members are involved in all levels of decision making as it pertains to the policies and program of the church. It means they have a right to choose their leaders, to oppose practices with which they disagree, and to free themselves from leaders who have become undesirable to them as a

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<sup>7</sup>H. H. Wilson, "Controversy, U.S.A. - 1953", Adult Leadership, II, 6 (November 1953), 10.

<sup>8</sup>George B. de Huszar, Practical Applications of Democracy (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945), p. 9.

result of their inefficiency, authoritarian methods, or for other bona fide reasons, keeping in mind that democracy may require that the policies adopted by larger units are binding on smaller units, until a change can be made by majority action of the whole. Democracy means that power and responsibility are diffused among the members and are visible and reviewable. Consequently, democracy is one of the most complex and difficult methods for organizing men for common goals and achievements. Yet, in the long run it is the most efficient, satisfying, and rewarding of any method of social control.

When individuals work together as functional equals on common problems, they learn to respect one another and to be considerate of various opinions and outlooks. Democratic participation in problem solving processes by all persons concerned with issues permits an inter-play of character and personality. A new appreciation for people is born of such experiences. Furthermore, a sense of responsibility for the maintenance of group values is learned when people are actually made responsible for their furtherance. Where democracy is practiced, hostility tends to be replaced with cooperation and harmony in the give and take of working at common tasks.

Much depends on whether we are willing to submit our values, goals, disputes and other interests to democratic control and resolution. If we are unable to do this in the church where we are supposed to have an unusual concern for persons and spirit of tolerance, how can we expect people in the larger communities of life to live by such precepts? As Wilson has pointed out:

Demonstration now that democracy can devise viable solutions to even the most complex problems will bolster the hopes of men everywhere. How we handle relatively limited and comprehensible domestic controversies will have a direct bearing on the resolution of world-wide revolutionary ferment, men's struggle for freedom, and national aspirations of peoples on every continent.<sup>9</sup>

The presence of democratic practices in a local church is a testimony to the faith of its leaders and members in the ultimate values of truth and love. It reveals a confidence in men and a zest for life without the intolerant and rigid prohibitions and strictures of authoritarianism. It says that the best life is the free life, religiously, intellectually, politically, economically, and socially. This is an important testimony in today's world.

The leader who is satisfied with the status quo is perhaps tempted at times to use whatever power is available to him to suppress opposition to the present order of things. He may resist appeals for change by subtly closing the channels of free expression. He may circumvent democratic procedures and set himself up as the authority for the ideology of the group. If worst comes to worst in his defensive actions, he may employ coercive techniques to silence opposition and maintain control. Leaders who choose this manner of meeting difficulties are unwittingly selecting a way of strife and conflict. Furthermore, they are denying by their actions some of the highest insights of the Christian faith into the nature of man, society, and social progress.

When leadership is creative, it is sensitive to the opinions,

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<sup>9</sup>Wilson, op. cit., p. 13.

criticisms, ideas and analyses of people in the group. It invites members to express themselves freely and to offer suggestions at every level of decision making. This would seem to be especially true of leadership in the area of social concerns where there are few if any clear cut, absolute moral issues and completely right solutions to the social evils which plague us. Munby has stated the case in the following passage:

It is...not possible to have a synthesis of Christian social thought that will be universally valid, or even valid for any given period. The facts are too diverse, society is too complex, and the human mind is too limited to comprehend but a small part of the whole reality....formerly this truth was obscured because people in simpler societies took so much for granted which we cannot take for granted today.<sup>10</sup>

Free expression is necessary, not only from the standpoint of humility concerning our ability to know, but because such freedom allows individuals to grow in their knowledge of the subject under consideration. People internalize values, facts, and insights best when they are discovered for themselves. In discussing the techniques which can be used in helping people attain a new social philosophy and ideology, Kurt Lewis says that the educational process should include: voluntary attendance, informality of meetings, freedom of expression, emotional security, and avoidance of pressure and control. "If the individual complies merely from fear of punishment rather than through the dictates of his free will and conscience, the new set of values he is expected to accept does not assume in him the position of super-ego

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<sup>10</sup>D. L. Munby, God and The Rich Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 5.

and his re-education is unrealized".<sup>11</sup>

Free expression is also necessary in the church so that aggressive impulses can be expressed as they develop and thereby avoid a build-up of hostility among members. When a church draws its strength, not from ideological rigidity but from flexibility, it will permit expression of dissent. If this occurs in a church, conflicting issues tend to bring cohesion to the fellowship rather than polarization and division. The diversity of opinion and the various feelings and objections which come out in discussions and decision making sessions can be stimulating in a free atmosphere.

Therefore, we should do all we can to establish democratic practices and traditions which represent creative approaches to problem solving. People should be expected to give an opinion on matters of concern to the church. One church group has the practice of going around the room at board meetings, and asking each member's opinion on matters of consequence before the group. This may be a rather mechanical approach to free expression, but it works in this instance and there are relatively few disputes over policy and program in this very active group.

When matters of social concern are being considered in the church, all opinions relative to the issues under study should be brought out, discussed, and evaluated. When there are to be programs on major social issues, both sides of the issues under consideration should be represented with persons who actually hold the opposing

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<sup>11</sup>Kurt Lewin, Resolving Social Conflicts (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 65.

points of view. It is all too easy for an expert to make a speech from one point of view in which he represents the opposing view as a straw man to be knocked down with his superior analysis. Persons in the audience who hold the opposing view naturally go on the defensive because their view has not been adequately represented. People are usually satisfied, however, when experts on both sides of an issue discuss it, and when persons present are allowed to ask questions. Often persons with minority opinions become much more tolerant of the official program and views of the church in such a session, and if they are still unconvinced of the ethical issues involved from a Christian point of view, they probably will not initiate a conflict over the social action of the church with regard to the issue.

In addition to making provisions for the expression of diversity in the formation of policies and programs in the local church, other provisions should be made for the expression of hostilities which people may not feel free to express in routine working committees. A grievance committee, pastoral relations committee, or some similar recourse should be readily available to members who want to express their feelings. Such committees provide vents for hostile aggressions and if their members are sensitive and skillful, they can often work out problems in human relations before they develop into conflicts.

The chairman of the pastoral relations committee in one local church ran the following announcement in the church newsletter:

The Pastoral Relations Committee, annually elected, serves as an official liaison between the membership of the church and the clergy. It has a two-fold purpose: 1) to bring to the attention of the clergy criticisms, grievances and the general attitudes of

the membership at large, and 2) to interpret the programs, policies, and positions on important matters which the clergy seeks to promote. It can be used as a means for the resolution of conflicts which may arise between individual members or groups and the clergy.

No organization, whether large or small, is without conflict. Differences can be stimulating, but not in an atmosphere of discontent, tension, ill feeling, misunderstanding, or where there is a breakdown in communication. An effective pastoral relations committee can do much to prevent the above from happening.

To be effective and to truly reflect the attitudes and feelings of the membership, such a committee must be informal. Therefore, the committee invites any and all members of our church to approach it freely. So that you might know who to approach, the members are identified as follows:.....

Social scientists refer to the technique of inviting the opposition to come into such a committee to express itself as "cooptation".<sup>12</sup> When people are permitted to express their rebellious attitudes and opinions in a committee where they are given full consideration, then there is no need to polarize. Cooptation insures a hearing at the heart of the organizational power structure where legitimate complaints can bring changes and where misunderstandings can be worked out. Cooptation, therefore, helps prevent one of the dynamic aspects of conflict from developing -- polarization of the membership. Every pastor should welcome the creative efforts of a pastoral relations committee in doing this type of work.

The persons with minority opinion in any problem solving or policy forming group can maintain a destructive, belligerent attitude in the work that must be done; or they can become a creative minority, maintaining the integrity of their analysis of problems, yet in a

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<sup>12</sup>James S. Coleman, Community Conflict (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957), p. 17.

spirit of helpfulness. A creative minority is good for any organization. It helps avoid ill-conceived programs, radical approaches, and excessive measures. It continually asks searching questions about proposed programs and policies. Such persons perform a valuable service for any church.

But in order for a minority to be creative in its relation to the majority, a spirit of reconciliation must prevail in the church. The ethic of love must be operative in the human relations of the church fellowship. People must be able to accept one another as persons with faults, weaknesses, inconsistencies, prejudices, and lack of knowledge, and recognize the possibilities for goodness which are in all people. Those who are truly reconciling in spirit hold the being of others as the most important value in human life and the law of love as the most fundamental moral law of our existence.

It is sometimes difficult for authoritarian personalities to be reconciling in their relationship with others. Their chief concern is with their own ego deficiencies and with the ideas and opinions which they have rigidly identified with their personal security. Boulding says that the authoritarian "is not interested in reconciliation but only in imposing his will and his values on others; the existence of values he regards as a threat to his person rather than as an opportunity for mutual learning".<sup>13</sup> Therefore, such seriously authoritarian persons should be led into a counseling program, if at all

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<sup>13</sup>Kenneth E. Boulding, Conflict and Defense (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 313.



possible, or into a therapy group where they can gain some insight into their personality and learn to be reconciling and creative in their personal relationships.

The church should do all in its power to teach the law of love as the accepted norm of behavior for Christians. The leaders of the church should endeavor to purge their own souls of any ill-will and to reflect an equalitarian attitude toward all persons in the church. Anger and hostility beget anger and hostility, while love and consideration tend to produce love and consideration. Experience with non-violent resistance suggests that heavy pressure can be applied on social evils, and that the spirit of good will which is a part of non-violence tends to reduce the intransigence of opponents. Leaders in the local church should, therefore, strive to build a reservoir of respect and good will. When those who are in the majority position have a reconciling spirit and approach, they can then expect those in the minority also to seek such an attitude. Where a church works with divergent internal opinions in a spirit of reconciliation across months and years, it projects something of the spiritual maturity which the Apostle Paul described in his memorable passage:

This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience -- it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.

Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when Truth prevails.

Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the

one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.<sup>14</sup>

### III. EDUCATION IN CHRISTIAN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Another important consideration which has emerged from this study of conflict in the local church is the need for more and better training of the membership in the official social philosophy of the church. Systematic attention needs to be given to such things as forms of government, human rights, economics, and the relations between these. There should also be an examination of the Biblical and theological motivation for the church's concern in these fields and an exploration of the nature and mission of the church. This education should be done well in advance of crises in which opinions are inflamed. We have earlier cited the results of the MESTA survey of social opinion in The Methodist Church conducted by Boston University, revealing that twenty five percent of Methodists received little or no ethical training from the church on crucial issues having to do with the social order. The degree of ethical insight gained from the teachings of the church varies from region to region, from local church to local church, and from denomination to denomination. As we have observed in an earlier chapter, the social environment of churches also influences the degree of social teaching which can be done, at least at the outset of a program of social education.

A program of education in the social aspects of the Christian

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<sup>14</sup>I Corinthians 13:4-8 (Phillips).

faith is needed in every local church. It should cover major social issues, pushed to the point of consensus and leading to an understanding of the ethical reasons for the official position of the denomination. A successful program of social action, both in the local church and on the denominational level, must ultimately rest on Christian laymen who understand and are committed to the social tenets of the gospel. Efforts to educate the members of a local church in the social applications of the gospel should begin on the level at which any particular local congregation may be in its social consciousness. It would seem the better part of wisdom for the leaders of a local church to try to ascertain the social attitudes and degree of prejudice in a congregation before an active social concerns program is initiated. The data from a survey can help guide officials in establishing a program of social education. To say this is not to plead for less social action. Most local churches could take much bolder action than they are presently taking without risking destructive conflict. However, a program of social concern which does not take the social concepts of people into consideration is ill conceived, indeed.

As churchmen, we could well learn the lesson from extremists organizations that education in social ideology is imperative in carrying on a program of action. Whenever extremists are active, they have an indoctrinational program using study groups and the distribution of literature. A recent convert to the John Birch Society in San Gabriel, California, wrote a mimeographed letter to her friends describing the first cell meeting she attended:

The entire meeting was conducted in a...spirit of patriotism and righteousness that equalled any church meeting I have ever attended. This fine spirit prevailed as our most loyal citizens studied legislation while it was up before Congress and offered their Congressmen their opinion, advice and assistance now,.... Therefore, they accomplished something besides just talk.<sup>15</sup>

While we seek to educate rather than indoctrinate, it would seem that Christian churchmen should require as much of themselves. If we do not, we will be increasingly less effective in our program of social concerns.

Preaching on social issues. Frequently church leaders think they have served the cause of social justice well when they have passed a conference resolution on a social issue or have preached a sermon on the same. Actually these have been found to be the poorest forms of social education. The MESTA survey at Boston University found that Methodist Conference pronouncements have little if any effect on individual Methodist beliefs.<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that they are without merit. Often the debate over resolutions brings before church leaders issues which they have not previously seen as important nor in the light of Christian social ethics. Other values could be cited, such as that of having a stated official or semi-official ideology, and the publicity to a wider public which social issues receive in such a debate. Therefore, it would seem wise to continue and even broaden the practice of passing conference resolutions on social

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<sup>15</sup>Mimeograph Letter sent by Lanny Kitchen, October 1, 1964, San Gabriel, California.

<sup>16</sup>Georgia Harkness, The Methodist Church in Social Thought and Action - A Summary. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 84.

issues, even though little direct social education is derived from them in the local church.

Preaching on social issues, or making indirect ethical reference to them in sermons, has some value even though this is perhaps not the most effective method of social education. The primary value in such preaching is probably the moral witness of a respected person. Rarely can a thirty minute sermon so adequately analyze the many aspects of a social issue that it could be called truly educational. However, sermons which deal directly and exclusively with a single social problem can point to certain ethical considerations and serve to stimulate further study.

Such a direct approach to social problems in the pulpit should be tempered by several considerations. We have already mentioned the necessity of knowing the general level of prejudice and social consciousness in the congregation in any effective program of social education. Any minister who undertakes to preach in this manner should recognize the relativity of his interpretation of the gospel and be confessional in his application of the ethical insights he perceives. Furthermore, he should do his "homework" well, making sure that his scholarship on the subject is adequate.

Harold Bosley says the preacher on social issues must do at least three things:

- (1) He must get the facts....
- (2) He must get a clear picture of the conflicting interpretations of fact that are at work in the public discussion of the issue....
- (3) He must reflect, whenever possible, the judgments of the general church as expressed in documents, and resolutions drawn up by representative religious

groups.<sup>17</sup>

The minister, also, should be very careful not to use the sermon to vent any frustrations and pent-up hostilities which he might have. Infrequently, righteous indignation has a mixture of these unworthy impulses. And to avoid devoting too much consideration to one or a few issues, the preacher should plan his sermons over long periods of time, preferably by the year. In such a plan, special observances and Sundays such as Labor Day and World Order Sunday can be used with good effects.

Most ministers who preach on social issues are inclined to use an indirect approach. This is, doubtless, more effective in getting listeners to accept what the minister is saying. Bosley describes this type of sermon as follows:

As a rule, it begins with some great religious theme -- like faith or humility -- and develops its meaning in terms of Scripture and Christian history. Then with this as a firm foundation, the preacher is able to move with freedom and decision among the vital problems of his own day illustrating the meaning, the power, and the need of such virtues and beliefs.<sup>18</sup>

If preaching is less effective than other methods of social education it is because it does not offer an opportunity for personal involvement and study. Communication is one way with no opportunity for response, exchange, clarification, or correction. People learn most when they are personally involved in study, research, and discussion. Some ministers are now providing a "talk back" time after

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<sup>17</sup>Harold A. Bosley, Preaching on Controversial Issues (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 23.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 22.

the worship service is over. Such a discussion can add much to the educational value.

Social education in the church school. Just as stewardship, the meaning of worship, the program of missions and other relevant subjects are taught through the church school, so should Christian ethics and social concerns be included in the curriculum. Few church school lessons should be devoid of the ethical implications of the religious truth being considered. Hendrik Kraemer says:

So, on the ground of the inner meaning and scope of God's self-disclosing and saving dealing with the world as a whole, the church...should be always conscious of this basic fact that it primarily exists on behalf of the world and not of itself.... The great redemption through Christ...consists in the liberation from self-regard and self-centeredness (as a church) which is the central sin and root of all corruption in human life.... The Church being world-centered in the image of divine example, is really the church.<sup>19</sup>

In a church school class which opens up the issues of the day and applies the Christian faith to them, learning of Christian social philosophy is possible. In such a class communication can be two ways since it is possible for persons to be involved in research, study, and discussion. Instead of doing this, however, all too often church school classes give undue consideration to such subjects as the miracles or the geography of the Holy Land in which they discuss the height of Mount Sinai, or whether or not the Sea of Galilee contains salt. However, in all fairness to those who write the lessons, we should point out that most church school publications contain a high

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<sup>19</sup>Hendrik Kraemer, A Theology of The Laity (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 130.

level of social awareness and responsibility. This is evidenced by the attacks which extremists make on church school literature.

Special study groups. Georgia Harkness reminds us of the importance of the class meetings which were composed of laymen in the nineteenth century church. The Wesley classes played a large part in the early growth of Methodism. Harkness says:

Here was a center of disciplinary action when this was called for, but here also was a center for mutual encouragement and group training in the Christian life. Long before "group dynamics" or "cell groups" or "prayer therapy groups" were heard of by these names, the classes were performing these functions.<sup>20</sup>

Study groups which delve into the meaning of the Christian faith and the formation of Christian philosophy in the light of social ethics could do much to renew the commitment of the church to its task in our day. Such study and involvement is especially needed for the leaders in the local church and as many others as possible. Far better than requiring church officials to sign legalistic pledges of abstinence would be a requirement for them to attend a twelve week study on Christian faith in its social application.

Small groups which are set up to study the Christian faith and social problems are most successful when they are for a limited period of time and are dealing with specific issues such as human relations or international affairs. George B. de Huszar says of such groups:

The size of the problem-centered-group varies, depending on conditions. There is reason to believe, however, that for most purposes a group of ten or twelve is the most efficient. A bigger group becomes unwieldy, a smaller one ineffective. The optimum group is probably around twelve, from the point of view

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<sup>20</sup>Harkness, op. cit., p. 30.



of effective action, possibility of consensus, intensity of face-to-face contact, and maximum individual participation.<sup>21</sup>

Ample resources in terms of study materials for such groups are available from the general offices of most denominations and from a number of other reliable sources. Great care should be taken, however, to see that materials which come from outside the church are academic in nature and are relatively free from bias.

Often existing groups in the church can be encouraged to engage in a serious study of Christian social ethics as they apply to the problems of the day. Such a study can have lasting effects for its findings tend to become a part of the group norms and ideology. Lewin says that such social reorientation in a close ingroup is much deeper and more lasting than learning in a class, and we could add, in a church service:

It is a process in which changes of knowledge and beliefs, changes of values and standards, changes of emotional attachments and needs, and changes of everyday conduct occur not piecemeal and independently of each other, but within the framework of the individual's total life in the group.<sup>22</sup>

The laymen of the church should be given greater opportunities for learning the full meaning of the Christian faith for an age of revolution and change, for a world which in many ways has come of age but which needs guidance in seeking justice for all men. Georgia Harkness says:

In recent years there has been a growing interest in theology among the laity. This is directly related to social thought and action, since laymen make the vast majority of the social, political, and economic decisions which affect human life, and

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<sup>21</sup>Huszar, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>22</sup>Lewin, op. cit., p. 58.

it is essential that these rest on Christian foundations instead of an uncritical adoption of secular programs.<sup>23</sup>

When the church does a better job of education in social ethics, there will be far less conflict and much more progress toward the values which are ultimate in human and social relations. The church will then be able to do for this age what it has for ages past: stand as a bulwark against injustice, greed, and belligerence; and for spiritual growth, peace, and the brotherhood of man in small hamlets as well as in the larger arenas of life.

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<sup>23</sup>Harkness, op. cit., p. 9.

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